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James Robertson of Newington





JAMES ROBERTSON OF NEWINGTON.

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James Robertson  
1813-1893

# JAMES ROBERTSON

OF NEWINGTON.

A Memorial of his Life and Work.

*WITH A PREFACE BY THE LATE*

REV. JOHN KER, D.D.

NEW YORK:  
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,  
530 BROADWAY.



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

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OWING to various circumstances, this Memoir, with other records of Mr. Robertson's life, has been delayed longer than was at one time expected. But it is believed that those who knew him will open it with a loving interest, and complete in their own memory the portrait which is here faintly sketched. And while it is sadly felt how little words can do to take the place of departed life to those who did not know him personally, it is yet hoped that even by such there may be felt some small measure of that influence for good which was so often experienced from contact with one who was always intent on his great errand, and full of sympathy for the souls of men in his endeavour to win them for his Master.

The Address on Flowers in the Memoir, and the Sermons to Children subjoined, are given under considerable disadvantage. They have been copied from

notes partly in shorthand, at times somewhat fragmentary, and not prepared with a view to publication. The difficulty of transcription has been a hindrance in the way of comparison and selection; and those who read them will miss the interjected thoughts and breathings which sometimes formed the most striking features in his discourses. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, it has been thought good to give some specimens of his mode of address to children, as whatever came from him bore the stamp of his own heart and spirit.

A debt of gratitude is due to those friends, mentioned elsewhere, who have so cordially contributed their individual experience of their intercourse with Mr. Robertson, to the Rev. Andrew Carter for much valued counsel and help, and to all those who have kindly lent letters, or otherwise aided in the preparation of this volume.

We deeply mourn that one who had an interest in these pages, and to whom we owe much, is no longer with us. Dr. Ker's sudden call came while this volume was passing through the press. His tender words here will linger with us, while it is some consolation to know that the Christian Church, in her great loss, is not left without what may now be

regarded as a parting gift of enriching thought from his pen, in other volumes.

We had hoped that this Memoir would also pass under the revision of Dr. Robertson of Irvine; but the illness which took him from us had set its fatal mark upon him ere the material was ripe for placing in his hands. Thus we have missed the privilege of his counsel and the touch of his delicate hand, which would have been of inestimable value, and the record remains in this sense, as in many others, incomplete. The two brothers—James and William Robertson—who here gave to the Church so beautiful a commentary on that word of the apostle, ‘There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit,’ are now reunited in the Church of the firstborn, each taking his own place in the song, each rendering his own particular service.

M. H. M.



## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
PREFACE, . . . . .	xi
CHAPTER I.	
HOME AND PARENTAGE, . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II.	
BOYHOOD, . . . . .	9
CHAPTER III.	
AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY, . . . . .	18
CHAPTER IV.	
DAYS OF WAITING, . . . . .	41
CHAPTER V.	
THE DIVINITY STUDENT, . . . . .	60
CHAPTER VI.	
PREACHER AND EVANGELIST, . . . . .	71
CHAPTER VII.	
MINISTRY IN MUSSELBURGH, . . . . .	84
CHAPTER VIII.	
EDINBURGH—DUNCAN STREET, . . . . .	112
	ix

	CHAPTER	PAGE
PASTORAL WORK AND HOME LIFE, . . . . .	146	
CHAPTER X.		
CLOUD AND SUNSHINE, . . . . .	169	
CHAPTER XI.		
GRANGE ROAD, . . . . .	190	
CHAPTER XII.		
NEW TIES AND WIDER SERVICE, . . . . .	203	
CHAPTER XIII.		
FAMILY BEREAVEMENTS, . . . . .	216	
CHAPTER XIV.		
‘CLOUDS AFTER RAIN,’ . . . . .	236	
CHAPTER XV.		
EVENTIDE, . . . . .	254	
CHAPTER XVI.		
HOME, . . . . .	277	
—		
SHORT SAYINGS, . . . . .	289	
EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS, . . . . .	299	
SERMONS TO CHILDREN, . . . . .	309	
EXTRACTS FROM AN ADDRESS GIVEN AT AN ANNUAL MEETING OF THE TRACT SOCIETY IN 1873, . . . .	346	
‘LOVE DIVINE, ALL LOVE EXCELLING,’ . . . .	350	

## PREFACE.

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WE are glad that this memoir is to come into the possession of the general public. It will be lovingly welcomed by all who had a personal knowledge of the subject of it, and it will help to extend an influence which belongs to those the poet speaks of—

‘Stillest streams oft water fairest meadows.’

Few ministries, which have diffused such a healing and fruitful power, have been so noiseless in their course ; and one is reminded of the links of the Forth, on which his native home looked down, winding out and in, calm and seemingly motionless, but all the more bringing refreshment to many a field.

He belonged to a family remarkable, both in parents and children, for an uncommon degree of Christian devotion and intelligence, with a faculty of sight and feeling peculiar to themselves, and rising in more than one case—in one very specially, still remaining among us<sup>1</sup>—to the vision and faculty divine which is called genius.

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. W. B. Robertson, D.D., who died 27th June 1886.

A few of the more marked features of the character of the man, and of his ministry, may be of some little service as a summary of what is told in the memoir, and they have this value at least, that they are not so much drawn from it, as that they are the independent witness of one who knew him well for many years.

The first, and indeed the pervading feature in him was this, that the ministry was the natural and necessary outcome of the man—that the man was constantly the minister. Not that he was thinking of the office, and girding himself up to its duties, still less to its officialism and proprieties, but that he was throughout his life, public and private, the minister of Christ to the souls of men. Made as he was by nature and by grace, his ministry was himself. From the very beginning, when his heart was touched by the grace of the Lord Jesus, he would be nothing else than a Christian minister. In his earliest years his eye was bent on preparation for the ministry, and, when he began it, on to the close of his life, he was occupied in the fulfilment of its service, not apparently by an effort of the will, but by the spontaneous movement of his heart. We may reasonably believe that if the labour, which the love to his work gave him, may have in some way weakened his health, in another and higher degree it strengthened it and added to his years. Before he began to preach, and often afterwards, he might say, ‘As dying, and behold we live.’ An object to live for helped him to keep

hold of life. If there be anything in mind-healing it is that a man should forget himself and go out to some absorbing aim ; and those who saw him at times utterly prostrated, and then rising and ‘walking and leaping and praising God,’ could not help thinking of the beautiful gate of the temple, and of a greater than Peter, whose eye he had caught and whose hand he had grasped, till the vision of Him and His service, ‘out of weakness made him strong.’

It was this same spirit which gave him the peculiar influence he had with his own people. They felt that he was a minister of Christ, not only when he was in the pulpit, or at the prayer-meeting, but always and everywhere. He could not meet them without leaving something behind, which told them what was nearest his heart, and made them feel he was ‘watching for souls.’ It was not done in any forced or far-fetched way, but by a quiet word or fitting incident, which left a fragrance like the ointment of the right hand—carried about and communicated when his hand touched theirs. He had great skill in this, which belonged, no doubt, to his original character, but which came also from his habitual purpose—‘This one thing I do.’ He had become wise in winning souls, from a deep persuasion that he is wise who seeks to win them. And this also made his ministry very wide. More than most he ‘walked in wisdom toward those that are without, redeeming the time.’ There were very few with whom he came into more

than the slightest contact, who could complain that no man cared for their soul. When he was travelling by railway, or walking in a country road, or entering a house on a casual errand, he was looking out for opportunities for dropping a seed-word. We never heard that any took his speech amiss ; often it happened that he found a place waiting for it. They could not mistake his motive, and they were won by his manner. There are more waiting to be spoken to in this way, if ministers had the courage and the aptitude—if they approached men in a natural human way. He seemed to have the three great requisites—he kept before him his Master's aim, he had a large portion of his Master's spirit, and he had studied his Master's methods. They are all contained in the words of Christ Himself, 'As Thou hast sent me into the world, so have I also sent them into the world.'

We have put this spirit of his ministry first, because we believe it went through all his work, and gave it its peculiar character. His Christian personality might be described as that of one who was seeking to keep close to the person of Christ, and to bring others to the same position. His preaching was evangelical to the core. The doctrines of the gospel were present in every fibre and filament of it, but they were never separated from Christ's own person, and thus faith rose into love and reverence and trust. The alabaster box of the heart was broken in His presence, and He was the Master at every feast. The

seven golden candlesticks of truth were lighted, but the Lord Jesus was always seen in the midst of them, and His own hand was felt as He said, ‘Fear not; I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore.’ The warmth of personal affection with which all the aspects of Christ’s life and character were dwelt on, the tone, and look, and manner which said, ‘This is my beloved, and this is my friend,’ gave to his preaching its distinguishing fragrance and unction. It was in the line of descent from that of Samuel Rutherford, and Andrew Gray of Glasgow, and Thomas Halyburton, and Ralph Erskine, and had their characteristic of the fancy set on fire by the heart, and sparkling and burning with a gleam and glow of originality. Bible histories came out with new life, texts were quoted in connections which revealed new sides of meaning, and figures of crystal-like beauty rose with a sudden surprise, not for ornament, and not elaborated, but to reflect Him whom he wished to commend, and then to pass away before His presence. He was not what is called a philosophical preacher, or logical in the sense of proceeding by links of argument, and so some reckoned him deficient in unity; but there is a unity of the heart as well as of the mind, the unity of a psalm as well as of a set of syllogisms, and this he had. He brought his hearers into a unison of feeling and impulse, which is surely the great end of preaching. Neither let it be thought that his sermons wanted

method. His pearls were not jointed into one another, which would have been against their nature, but they were strung, and arranged in divisions, which had headings, frequently of a very felicitous kind. He was fond of alliteration and antithesis, and this, with his striking illustrations, made his preaching remarkably memorable. At seasons when strongly moved, all unconscious to himself, his voice rose and fell into a musical cadence, which kept time to his subject, and brought his hearers into closer sympathy. It had come down from the old style of the Secession and Puritan period, if it was not earlier, but it belonged not less to his own emotional nature.

He had, however, strong affinity for all that is best in the new life of the Church, and especially for interest in the young, one of the most hopeful features of our time. His happy nature and his faculty of illustration fitted him especially for dealing with them. The saying of the old Greek moralist, 'Speak nothing base in the house where there is a child,' was turned by him to a positive precept, Never fail to speak what is loving and Christian. At the sight of the children in the family his eye brightened, and he had them round him, first for their own sakes, and then as the best way of reaching the other members of the household. When he preached in his own church, or indeed anywhere, he always remembered the children's portion, and at intervals he had his entire service for them. In this he was not the first in time, but he

did much to make it more general, and to give examples of the best methods of performing it. He was, we believe, excelled by none and equalled by few. It was not merely the fixed attention he secured in large gatherings, for this is only a means—it was the amount of Christian truth he conveyed in the most attractive and impressive manner. In his own church, the portion for the young, sometimes at the close, sometimes scattered through the service, was not the least valued by the more mature hearers. For brother ministers who assisted him, the request, ‘Remember the lambs,’ was seldom forgotten, and was the means of carrying his own spirit into other congregations. The result was that the care of the young in his church, through the Sabbath school, and in the mission district, was a model of Christian work. He breathed his spirit into his people; he was never happier than when surrounded by his teachers and moving through their classes, and his mind was much employed in ingenious plans for interesting the children in Christian truth, and helping them to remember it. In this respect, like wisdom, ‘he found out knowledge of witty inventions.’ It would take too long to tell here, but it may be discovered from the memoir, how other branches of work were carried on. He was himself an assiduous visitor to the sick, the bereaved, the lonely; but there were agencies which penetrated the congregation in all directions, to help them in their trials and guide them in their activities. His

principle was to discover the aptitude of every member for taking share in any of the operations of the church, and to enrol them accordingly. The community was thus like a piece of clock-work with all the wheels in movement, or like a beehive full of the sights and sounds of life. The complaint against many of our Protestant edifices that they are open only on one day of the week and closed all the rest, could not be made against his, or the halls and rooms connected with it. The evening lights and the hum of voices gave token of what was being done for self-improvement or work for fellow-men. All this could not be carried on without a strong central fire in the pulpit, and a constant lighting and trimming of the lamps in the departments of action. It spoke to an intensity and to an organizing gift, which do not frequently meet in one. The effect of it was the binding of his people together by a family tie, the production of a kinship of character, and a fulfilment in an unusual degree of the apostolic injunction, 'Not forsaking the assembling together,' and a 'provoking to love and to good works.'

One thing which struck those who knew him intimately was the constant care he had about his work, and the preparation for it. To furnish provender for the household of faith was not simply the business of the study at set times, but the engrossing occupation of his life. He was never without his note-book and pencil, to jot down thoughts which occurred to

him, or incidents which could be turned to profit in sermons, or classes, or even for individuals, in the way of cheer and comfort ; for he really individualized his congregation, and studied how he might be helpful to them one by one. This gave point to his preaching and aim to his prayers, and one could feel that he was truly seeking to learn by heart, and carry out in life, that beautiful first chapter of Philippians, which strikes the deepest chords of the affection a Christian minister should bear to his people : ‘ For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment ; that ye may approve things that are excellent ; that ye may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ.’

Before finishing these notices of his public work, it may be right to say a word as to the movements in which he took a share outside his own congregation. It may be owned at once that he was not a man of war. He did not take an active place in the battles which gather round great questions in Church or State ; nor was his voice heard much, if at all, in ecclesiastical discussions. He had his decided convictions, and was not afraid to own them ; and he was very far from the weak narrowness which would condemn *Valiant for truth* as secular-minded and unspiritual. He had a great esteem for the resolute soldiers who can ‘ rebuke the multitude of spearmen,

and put to silence the lips which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously ;' but blows and battles were not suited to his temperament, and he was not found sharing in the throng of them. Yet he had plenty of courage in his own way. He could speak a quiet word for a right cause, which went straight to the mark, and he could join, when conscience was at stake, an unpopular movement against any odds. The abstinence cause had no steadier adherent, long before it had taken its place in public approval. He was faithful to it in the face of the smile and the sneer which met it in its youth ; he was a diligent worker in its societies, and an advocate on its platforms. He had the work of evangelization at heart in all its forms, and welcomed it where respectable profession might be ready to frown, or to pass by on the other side. It did one's heart good to mark his delight at the discovery of some humble worker for the same Master, on whose track he had fallen, and the quaintness of their expressions and methods, which he would describe with a pleasant humour, seemed to bind them closer to his heart. His sketch of Robert Flockhart, the Edinburgh street preacher, is a gem of its kind, and that somewhat eccentric herald of the gospel had no warmer friend. The Conferences which it is now the custom for Christians to hold in different parts of the country, were well acquainted with his face and his voice. He visited them as some seek mountain air or sea breezes for

exhilaration and bracing. He was one of the first to join Mr. Moody in his apostolic work, and in his visits to Edinburgh he gave valuable aid in dealing with inquirers at his meetings. For this he was peculiarly well adapted. He had deep sympathy with the work, a great affectionateness of nature, a clear and simple way of putting Scripture truth, and a rare knowledge of the human heart when it is stirred by the touch of God's Spirit. Original gift and long experience had made him a spiritual pathologist. With all this—we may say *because* of all this—he had great delicacy and wisdom. He knew when to stop at the door within which God asserts His own claim, and how to guide the soul to the presence of its Maker and Lord without himself intruding there. On one occasion when a zealous worker wished to count the cases of conversion, he quietly passed the proposal by, and gave out the psalm which closes—

‘When God the people writes, He'll count  
That this man born was there.’

For many years he continued these activities, and it was surprising to all who knew him, and would have been, at first, to himself, could he have anticipated it, that a frame originally delicately strung and sensitive, should possess such powers of endurance. But at length it gave way, and the inability to carry on the work, which was the breath of his life, was, in the beginning, a sore trial. About the same time family bereavement fell on him, heavy and repeated.

His wife, who had been his strength and solace in all his work, a woman of remarkable wisdom and devoutness, was taken from him, and three daughters in succession, in the first bloom of a beautiful Christian womanhood. There was hope that the youngest might be spared through the help of a southern climate, and he spent a winter with her at San Remo in the Italian Riviera. They were attracted by the prospect of usefulness: he, in preaching and visiting among the English-speaking residents, and in touching by broken sentences and by hymns the Italian heart—which is beginning there to open to the gospel; and she, in the aid she might be able to give to the mission through the service of song. The desire, and it was a very deep one, was all she was allowed to give; ‘she did what she could.’ Week by week she faded away, in the most beautiful spirit of resignation, and when the bright anemones and all the flowers of spring were on the hills, she died. During this sorrowful time, when deep was calling unto deep, and the fond earthly hope was passing over through the struggle of faith into the heavenly one, he tended her with the one hand, and carried on his work with the other. Without this preoccupation, he might have sunk entirely, and there is evidence that the words he spoke out of his great trial of affliction were not without the testimony of God’s Spirit. He was a comfort to many, and the means of new life to some. He left his daughter there, in the beautiful cemetery among

the olive trees, close to the murmur of the Mediterranean, with the texts she most loved graven on her tomb, in Italian and English, that she might speak to those who came to look on it, and carry out in death the mission on which she had set her heart. The place is a fit one for the words of the poet—

‘Sing softly, spring bird, for her sake ;  
And thou not distant sea  
Lapse lightly, as if Jesus spake,  
And thou wert Galilee.’

I saw him at Paris on his way homeward, and have met with few things so touching as the narrative of her long, self-forgetful death-bed, her interest in the work she was not allowed to share, her strong simple faith and bright hope, and the light which these sent up into the sky for him, as he followed in the desolateness of his heart. The anguish he felt was tempered and softened almost to a removal, as he turned his eye to that sunset which had in it the promise of ‘a morning without clouds, and a clear shining after rain.’

We may give a few of the expressions contained in his letters at this time, as an example of his state of mind, and his manner of speech. If, besides those contained in this memoir, a collection of similar sayings could be made from his sermons and addresses, we believe it would be a valuable treasure of Christian experience, containing often ‘apples of gold in baskets

of silver.' One of his first letters from San Remo begins, 'They of Italy salute you.'

When nearing the New Year, 'Round the cape of this season, what ships of memory come floating, freighted with loving recollections of those who have reached the desired haven, and the golden city.'

'What though our way be hedged on every side with thorns, if it keep us in the way to glory?'

'I have been labouring to turn away my eyes from the waves to the Rock.'

'Neither sun nor stars for a good long time have appeared, but we are casting out our anchors and longing for the day.'

'He walks the billows with us, and we hear Him say, It is I.'

'Many a promise written in sympathetic ink we cannot read till the fire of trial brings out the characters.'

'The farther we go down the shaft of affliction, the deeper are we led into the gold mines of spiritual experience.'

'If Jesus seems to sleep in our vessel, He sleeps with His hand on the helm, and will steer us homeward.'

When he returned to Scotland, he could not resume work, in his former place and way, in Edinburgh. His strength had failed for continuous exertion, and the memories that met him brought up too painful contrasts. His home, which had been filled with

happy voices, was silent, while every object spoke of his losses, and he had a heart peculiarly sensitive to impressions. He had now a colleague well fitted to carry on the care and work of the church, and he was in that respect free. It belonged to his character that he could not be idle, and he had too high an idea of the purpose for which life is given, to sit down and brood. One remarkable feature of the gospel of Christ is, that while it deepens a man's sensitiveness, it heightens his activity ; the heart has keener sorrows, but more abundant fruits of love. During what remained of life he never rested. Sabbath after Sabbath, and week after week, he was found in all parts of the country preaching and teaching, with the special interest he had always taken in the young, now more marked than ever, as if he wished to adopt them all in the room of those he had lost, and build up a larger family for the one that had been broken. It was what an old Puritan has called, 'taking a noble revenge on death for the losses he had suffered at its hand.' He was called away suddenly with his foot in the furrow, his hand on the plough, and his eye bent forward. No two years of a life full of labour were perhaps so fruitful in quickening and comfort to young and old as his last. It will be found, we believe, true of it all, but especially of the close, 'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.'

We can only say again that we are glad these memorials are to be brought under the eye of the Christian public, all the more that his life was to a great extent a hidden one, and his labours not carried on in what are called ‘the high places of the field.’ That life had such a character that the example and lessons of it should have permanence beyond the memories of those who knew him. To them the record of it will be specially welcome as a fragrance that blossoms from the dust; but we trust it will reach the hands of many more. To Christian ministers it may be a stimulus to varied and unwearied diligence, and especially to the truth of what Philip Henry says, that ‘weeping should not hinder sowing.’ It is a great encouragement to all Christians to see that a life of much trial may be a life of deep happiness, ‘as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing.’ The poet has said of nature when he compares her spring labour with her autumn fruits—

‘She sees with other eyes than ours  
The fruit of suffering born ;  
The hearts that blossom like her flowers,  
And ripen like her corn.’

But it is better still to see it exemplified in human lives, and to have a view of the peaceable fruits of righteousness that spring up, not only after, but beside sore afflictions. It is an evidence that while we are moving away from the origin of the gospel in time, we are always as near its spring of power, and

that the Saviour, who left His legacy many centuries ago, is close to those who seek Him, as a personal Friend, to bring home its provisions, ‘Peace I *leave* with you, My peace I *give* unto you.’ The life of James Robertson is a witness to it.

JOHN KER.

‘When they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs.

‘He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My sheep.

‘He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed My sheep.’

## C H A P T E R I.

### *Home and Parentage.*

UPWARDS of seventy years ago, on a wintry Sabbath morning, a young couple on horseback were seen wending their way down the long sloping road above the field of Bannockburn, and on through the narrow village of St. Ninians, and up the steep romantic walk by the Castle Rock, at the ringing of the bells, to the old historic Church of the Secession, then called the 'Back Row,' and now 'Erskine Church,' Stirling. It was John Robertson of Greenhill, with Margaret Kirkwood, his wife, and this was their 'kirkin' day.

Born in the same neighbourhood, each of godly parents of modest worth and unobtrusive piety, 'they grew together side by side,' were brought up in their respective homes under refined and Christian influences, and, ere the bride had completed her twentieth year, they began together, in the fear of God, to establish a home of their own in the quiet house at Greenhill.

Both are well worthy of remembrance, not only as

the parents of James Robertson, but because of their own sweet and lofty Christian character. We may be pardoned, therefore, if we pause a moment to speak of them, and of the home around which so many hallowed associations have gathered.

John Robertson was a native of Auchenbowie, in the parish of St. Ninians, and even when a boy gave evidence of the intellectual ability, the moral strength and firmness of character, and the deep and genuine piety which so distinguished him in maturer years. He studied in the University of Edinburgh, with the intention of entering on one of the learned professions ; but failure of health compelled him to relinquish his favourite pursuits, and return to the quiet rural life of his boyhood, becoming assistant, and afterwards successor, to his father, as factor on the estates of Plean and Auchenbowie. While diligently attending to the ordinary duties of the business, and well fitted, both by nature and training, for its more scientific departments, his mind was of that contemplative order that rendered him, in the highest and best sense, a 'student' throughout, and even to the close of his long life.

In the study of chemistry and mathematics he took peculiar pleasure—especially the higher mathematics ; but it was in the field of theology that his thought and spirit roamed with the rarest delight and liberty, and the home of his heart was ever in the lofty region of spiritual truth. He had his favourite authors, such as Edwards, Foster, Fuller, and Dr. John Brown ; but

he was not satisfied with drawing from human cisterns —‘he went directly to the fountain-head, and drank from the well of life pure and undefiled.’

In the winter of 1809 he was married to Margaret Bruce Kirkwood, whose maternal uncle was the Rev. Professor Bruce of Whitburn. She was a woman of peculiarly gentle and amiable manners and disposition, inheriting the genial nature as well as the mild liquid eye of the Bruce family, and in all points was a true ‘help-meet’ and ‘heir with her husband of the grace of life.’ Her quick perceptions, prudent management, and calm, presiding wisdom will not soon be forgotten by those who knew her best—a faithful transcript of Solomon’s virtuous woman—‘the heart of her husband safely trusted in her, and her children rose up to call her blessed.’

Little or nothing of the home life in its earliest stage can now be recalled, but some glimpses of it, as seen at a much later date, have been kindly given by one who knew it well—the Rev. James Brown, D.D., of Paisley. He writes :—

‘The immediate surroundings of Greenhill are commonplace enough; but it is in the neighbourhood of historic scenes. It stands on the higher ground that skirts the Carse of Stirling on the south. The field of Bannockburn, with the Gillies’ Hill and the Bloody Ford, is but a little way to the north-west; and the Torwood is as near on the south-east. Indeed, the scenes of all the famous battles in the War of Independence which stretch from Stirling Bridge to Falkirk are within easy walking distance. From the open

ground near the house the grand solid masses of the Ochils can be seen across the Carse, while the airier heights of the South-Western Grampians rise beyond.

‘Little of the house is visible until you are near it, but there is a small end window upstairs that can be seen from afar, above the hedges and garden trees. In other days it used to be remarked by the neighbours that the light in this window burned long into the night. It was the window of the study, tenanted by one after another in the succession of student sons ; and through the long years, by day and by night, that window seemed to hold out kindly welcome to all of the student tribe who eared to seek shelter under the roof.

‘There was no respect of persons at that hospitable fireside. The nameless lad, struggling through College and Hall, was received with as much honour and kindness as the popular minister or the learned professor. Every prophet, or son of a prophet, who passed by, was welcome to turn aside, and he failed not to find a “chamber, with a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick,” or to be “constrained to eat bread.”

‘Years after Greenhill had ceased to be the Greenhill I knew so well, I had it vividly brought to mind as I rode through Shunem, on the way from Ayin Ganim to Nazareth ; for there too there was, in ancient days, a homestead at which the man of God was always welcome ; and I remarked that, like Greenhill, it stood on a rising ground overlooking a great plain—the battlefield of Palestine, as the Carse of Stirling is the battlefield of Scotland—and was surrounded by corn-fields, where in harvest there were reapers, and children playing among the sheaves.

‘In the garden, through part of which the visitor reached the front door, I never saw anybody at work, and yet that garden was always in order. It was one of the characteristics of Greenhill that, both within and without, the work seemed to be done quietly and out of sight. There was no bustle, and the harsh sounds of labour were never heard, and yet everything was duly done. The only sound of work that I remember to have noticed was the leisurely clip of the “shears” with which Mr. Robertson himself trimmed the garden hedges. It used to float in at my bedroom window with the sweetness of the morning light, and the twitter of the birds beneath the eaves.

‘No one could enter the house without becoming conscious of a peculiar charm. You saw no signs of wealth, but there was that atmosphere of refinement which wealth cannot purchase. The furniture was plain and simple; but a little ornament here, and a bit of drapery there, gave to the whole an air of lightness and grace. Stillness pervaded the rooms—not the heavy stillness which makes the hours long and the tick of the clock monotonous, but the delightful stillness which brings to jaded nerves a sense of rest. The air that came in at the windows was fragrant, and the very light was softened.

‘I have no doubt I am idealizing as I look back through the vista of thirty years; but the ideal is often the most truly real; and after all, the air that fills a house is that which is breathed out by the spirit of those who dwell in it, and the light in which one sees it bathed is that which shines from their eyes.

‘When I went to Greenhill first, the father and mother were still together; but there were already lines on the

mother's face which betokened their early separation. When I went again her place was empty, and Mr. Robertson seemed to have gained, through experience of his greatest sorrow, in the sweetness and dignity of nature which had won my reverence from the first. He was an educated man, and in his ease the highest end of education—the culture and refinement of the whole nature—had been reached. In his double relations to the men who served him, and to the proprietors whom he served in turn, he so demeaned himself as to win the confidence and affection of both. Everything went smoothly under his moderating hand. None of the farmers or cottars for miles around ever dreamed of carrying their disputes into courts of law. They learned to bring them for settlement to Mr. Robertson, or to his son Andrew, who grew up to be associated with him in his work, and to share his spirit.

'But it was not education only that made Mr. Robertson the man he was. His "higher education" was the education of the spirit, carried on under Divine teaching, in the closet, at the family altar, in the "Back Row" Church, and throughout his whole life. I never understood how much the life at Greenhill, and all that went forth from it to enrich and ennable the life of the Church, were indebted to the pulpit ministrations at Stirling, until I read a volume of sermons by Dr. Smart. In these sermons the poetry of Christian doctrine, and the comprehensive, far-reaching morality of the Christian life, are set forth with an eloquence that must have laid hold of the minds of hearers, and had a powerful influence in moulding their character. When such seed fell upon such good ground as was in the Greenhill family pew, it could not fail to bring forth fruit after

its kind ; for even genius is not independent of the influence of early teaching.

‘Mr. Robertson had some favourite themes on which he delighted to dwell. Chief of these was the need there is for a higher ideal of the Christian Church. He thought the terms of communion in all the Churches were too easy. He would, even at the risk of fewer going in, have had the gate made straiter and the way made narrower—not straiter and narrower through the setting forth of a less universal love, but through the demand for surer signs of living faith. He could not accept the general interpretation of the parable of the Tares, and was accustomed to insist—against, it must be admitted, accepted theories of Church discipline—that it is in “the field” which “is the world”—not the field which is the Church—that the tares and the wheat should be permitted to grow together until the harvest. I remember his pleasure when some Moderator of Synod—I think it was Dr. Robson—gave, in his opening sermon, what Mr. Robertson believed to be the true interpretation of the “gold, the silver, and the precious stones,” and of the “wood, hay, and stubble,” in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians. He held that they signified worthy and unworthy Church members, and that the apostle was pointing to the peril of admission on a mere “credible profession.”

‘I think I never knew a man who so fully realized the idea of “walking with God” as did Mr. Robertson. He set the Lord always before him ; and so it seemed as if there might have been written over his doorway, “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” The talk at his fireside, ever quiet and refined, was of all subjects of human interest—of literature, of politics, of

ecclesiastical affairs ; and yet one always felt, when it was over, as if one had been reading the Beatitudes, or listening to St. Paul's chapter in praise of "charity."

A few well-weighed words of the late Rev. J. Steedman, the pastor of his later years, may not unfitly close this chapter :—

'His was not the thin and feeble nature which affords no ground for the anchorage of strong convictions. On religious matters his opinions were formed with peculiar caution, and held with a firm grasp. Although liberal and tolerant of other men's opinions, he was not one of those liberals who are "tossed about with every wind of doctrine," "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth;" or tolerant of all religious opinions as equally true and safe. Those called "Evangelical" were graven on his heart as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond.'

## C H A P T E R I I.

### Boyhood.

1816–1828.

SUCH were the influences under which James Robertson's childhood and youth were moulded. It is to be regretted that the page of his early life is nearly blotted out, since they are gone who could so well have given it.

We believe he was born in the spring of 1816. The day is uncertain.

His mother used to say that of all her fourteen children, James, who was the fourth, was the tiniest and feeblest, and the least likely to live beyond the days of infancy. His twin-brother John, a strong, healthy child, about whom there was no anxiety, was taken off by sudden illness when only a few months old, while the tender James struggled on through weakness into strength, giving the parents cause to sing of mercy as well as of judgment.

As his childhood developed he was peculiarly unlike other children. The common routine of toys and play had no charms for him. His *one* toy was a pulpit, and his *one* game preaching. As soon as he was old

enough to be taken to church, what he saw there was faithfully enacted at home, and became the business of the week. The rostrum chosen was usually the top of a ‘dyke,’ that the servants working about might be within hearing; while his elder brother Andrew, with that characteristic modesty and love of the lower room which distinguished him through life, acted the ‘beadle’ or ‘precentor’ as occasion required. The youthful preacher was always careful to secure his subordinate with cords or reins, so that there might be no chance of escape until the service—usually a long one—was concluded.

A small tragedy, however, brought this conjunction of affairs to a sudden termination.

James had been taken one day to a church in the neighbourhood, in which the minister had resorted to the familiar mode of touching the precentor on the head when he wished him to sit down, the psalm having been thought too long to sing to the end. This was of course observed by the child, who pondered in silence over its meaning; and, before reaching home, he had come to the conclusion that the minister had knocked the precentor down! This *was* something new, and must be acted immediately. So Andrew was summoned, and pinioned even tighter than usual. The 119th Psalm was given out. But before two verses were accomplished, down came the little fist with incredible force on the unsuspecting head below!

The rest we need not relate. It was too much

*even for Andrew*, and from that time James had to look about for another precentor.

As he grew, his ruling passion grew with him, and, through his winning ways, he succeeded in coaxing some of the servants to erect for him, in a corner of the garden, a real wooden pulpit, of true orthodox size and form. This was a great joy to him, and a treasure he was eager to show to all visitors who came to the house. The poet's saying that 'the child is father of the man,' true in many cases, was certainly true in his; and there, many years after, in his student days, and even beyond them, did that same pulpit become the centre of large gatherings of young people from the surrounding district, on Saturday afternoons, to hear from his lips the 'wonderful words of life.'

At the age of seven, he was sent to the village school of Dunipace, whence, three years later, he passed to the higher tuition of the late Rev. Archibald Browning of Tillicoultry, whose name as a high-class teacher was at that time widely known. It was not without a pang of anxiety that the mother saw her tender, sensitive child go from her, to keep abreast with boys several years older than himself, and in a school in which study *was* study and not play.

The following is from the pen of Mrs. Smith, widow of the late Rev. William Smith of Bannockburn, and daughter of Mr. Browning:—

'For some years prior to 1826 my father was beginning to be known, beyond the district of Tillicoultry, as a very

thorough teacher, and pupils were attracted to his school without the modern expedient of flaming advertisements. Tillicoultry in those days was but a hamlet, composed of two or three handloom factories by the side of the stream, a few straggling houses, the parish church and school, and the Secession meeting-house.

‘The system of teaching adopted by my father was unique, and far in advance of those days. His great aim seemed to be in the case of every pupil to awaken and stimulate thought and beget a love of learning, and to inspire a purpose of becoming a useful and intelligent member of society. Ten hours a day were devoted to school work in the school-room ; but of this only a very small portion was set apart to the mere “saying” of lessons. The greatest portion of the day was employed by the teacher in explaining and making easy to be understood, by attentive listeners, the lessons for the succeeding day. It must be mentioned here that strictness was a necessary accompaniment of such a system. No excuse whatever obtained against full preparation, when the lessons came to be, in school phrase, *said*.

‘James Robertson was in every respect from the first what may fairly be termed a model pupil. I cannot recall a single instance, in his case, of rebuke for careless or imperfect work. It was about the year 1826 that he entered school, and his appearance then was that of a very slight, delicate, sensitive boy, of pale countenance, with large expressive eyes and fair hair, well brushed back from a broad forehead. During the two school sessions he studied English, History, Latin rudiments and grammar—translating portions of Cæsar, Ovid, Horace, and Virgil—Greek grammar, and translating the Greek Testament. The text-books for the study of

English literature were Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the Bible History of the Jews, with the Life of Christ from the New Testament. In each of these subjects he was always very carefully prepared.

‘He was seldom seen in the playground but as a spectator. His favourite pastime was reading voluntarily some standard author under the shade of the trees. Being very gentle in disposition, and too fragile in frame to indulge in rough games, he took no part in such. It is not usual that a pupil so constituted becomes a favourite with his fellow-scholars, but there was in his manner and conduct a kind and winsome earnestness that overcame all opposition. When any request for a half-holiday—to ramble on the hills, or by the side of the Devon—had to be presented, he was frequently the deputy selected, and was invariably successful.

‘On Wednesday afternoons there was a slight change in the school routine. All were required to write a letter or an essay. These terms do not convey the distinction in the task which now might be inferred. A letter of fifty years ago was far more nearly analogous to a school essay of to-day, than might at first sight appear to the everyday letter-writer of 1886.

‘The best specimens were read aloud in the evening before the household. Not infrequently those of James Robertson were amongst the selected specimens. When time permitted, a recitation followed.

‘The literature of that period for the young was very scanty, and generally poor. It is therefore not surprising that Pollok's *Tales of the Covenanters* were eagerly read and much prized. James seemed to be deeply impressed with them, and when his turn came to recite, he determined

to repeat the story of “Helen of the Glen.” His recitation of that tale is still vivid in my memory. He delivered it with such power and tenderness, that several of the auditors were in tears. This effect, produced by a boy of about eleven years of age, exemplifies his ability of awakening sympathy and arousing feeling, developed in his after career to such prominence and power.

‘He was compelled to leave school shortly after this episode, on account of ill-health, before his second session terminated. Shortly afterwards, when I visited Greenhill, I found him, though much of an invalid, following the system initiated in Tillicoultry, in the case of his brothers and sisters, and this of course when he was yet a boy, not old enough to enter the higher forms of the modern High School.’

Some of the letters to which Mrs. Smith refers as ‘nearly analogous to a school essay,’ are still preserved. They are in a formal style of composition, and written in a beautiful hand, most correctly. Addressed to his brother Andrew at a time when they were not at school together, and treating, essay-like, of some particular subject, they show the unmistakeable leanings of the boy’s mind, and his measuring earthly things by their relation to things unseen, at this early period, when from ten to twelve years of age.

Another member of Mr. Browning’s household, an old servant, remembers the arrival of James and Andrew at her master’s house, and that the fragile look of the former attracted her at once. She repeats

Mrs. Smith's testimony that James, making good use of his time, and being nervously anxious over his lessons, could always say them, and quite satisfied Mr. Browning; and adds that an essay he wrote on 'River Scenery' was thought such a marvellous production for a boy of his years, that Mr. Browning was proud to read it over to all visitors.

Our informant envied the boys their education, and was greatly interested in any lessons she heard; and nothing pleased her better than to take her stool into the school-room, in the evening, to hear the boys repeat, in their own words, a story which they had read, and which Mr. Browning gave as an exercise, to enable them to express themselves fluently. To James it was one which suited both his taste and talent, and his stories were for the most part so touching, and so graphically told, that she frequently applied her apron to her eyes.

While at this school he had a slow fever, and to her was delegated 'the pleasant task' of attending to his wants during the night. He was so pleased to see her that he would lie long awake, talking principally on religious subjects, and his experience was such, she thought him 'the maist winderfu' laddie' she had ever seen. Now and again he broke in with, 'Jenny, I know you have to be up early, and I'm vexed to keep you wakin', but I just like to have somebody to crack tae.'

Their respect was mutual, and he would have her

to Greenhill, to see his home and people. She spent a night there, and remembers vividly the respectful bearing of all the workmen to the young boy. Much to her regret, he left Tillicoultry before she did, but the friendship formed so early he did not allow to drop. Many a kindly visit he paid to her, in her own house, in after years.

To this period of school life James was accustomed to refer, in after days, as a very happy and profitable one; and he, as well as his brother Andrew, retained throughout life a warm affection for their old master.

Eight years later we find him writing of having 'spent two happy days in Tillicoultry, and found enough in his old master to indicate the purest ore of human excellence;' adding, 'No man needs go thither who wishes to forego the human prerogative of laughter.' And again: 'Mr. Browning, who has been with us, possesses a mind of uncommon power. While others are passing on slowly, step by step, he can leap at once to the conclusion—quick-sighted to discern truth afar, and logical in the arrangement of his thoughts. They are all great thoughts too, and when they struggle forth in their native, unadorned grandeur, there is a nervousness in his speech, which vastly more than compensates for the want of the beauties of a highly polished diction.'

Some years further on, and shortly before Mr. Browning's death in 1858, Mr. Robertson went to see him. He found him in bed, and surrounded not by

pillows, but by *books* ; the only portion of the man visible being the large wonderful head, which, in form, has been compared to that of Luther or Robert Hall.

They had not met for years, and it was touching to observe how the old man's eye melted at sight of his old pupil, and how tenderly he embraced him as if he had been his son.

Mr. Robertson was going on to express regret at finding him *where* he was—fearing he was ill—when the reply came with all the ring of health : ‘ *Ill !* man, I never was better all my life ; but I just wanted to make a good sermon, and I always come *here* when I want to do that.’

## CHAPTER III.

At Glasgow University.

1828-1833.

HAVING returned home from Tillicoultry in the summer of 1828, he began his studies at Glasgow College, in the month of October of that year, joining the Latin and Greek classes when he was but twelve years of age. For four years he studied Greek under Sir Daniel K. Sandford, whom he warmly admired, and whose death in 1837 he truly lamented, as that of one 'who had the power of attaching a class to himself and to its work, in a manner that will never be forgotten by the thousands that attended on his instructions, who would feel his loss as that of a brother and a friend.'

During his first winter at college, while still so young, he was interesting himself in the improvement of the younger ones at home, and we find one of these, a sister, aged nine or ten, who died early, writing a letter of the Tillieoultry type, and fulfilling in it a promise she had made him to 'turn some sentences of the *Economy of Human Life* another way.'

Having, during his college years, met a youth from

Edinburgh, who was visiting friends in the neighbourhood of Greenhill, their casual acquaintance ripened into a warm Christian friendship. The young man died early, but James Robertson's letters to him were carefully preserved by his friends. They are unusually mature for a lad of fourteen or fifteen, and are written in a deferential tone that belonged to his nature and training and modest estimate of himself, with the scrupulous exactness of the Tillicoultry tuition, and in a style which was too formal for his own original tastes, but which he soon learned to modify when he sought how best to tell effectively on his fellow-men, and to find the most direct way to their hearts for his message of love and mercy and righteousness. Still, whatever of the formal bound him in his modes of expression in these letters, they are the true outcome to his friend of his likings and aspirations. We give a few extracts:—

‘ 28th April 1830.

‘ . . . In the logie class there is no riding in imitation of Don Quixote on an old, lean, raw-boned and lazy horse like Rosinante. If one would rise above mediocrity *there*, he must provide himself with such a fiery charger as may be seen pricking up his ears—snorting, pawing, kindling into foam and rejoicing in his strength when he smelleth the battle afar off. During the last two months I have often been sleepless for more nights than one in succession. But I flatter myself with the prospect of soon running away from the hurry and inquietude of class study, and with hope of

getting rid of all the headaches and odious giddiness which they have entailed. . . .

‘Let us value praise and honours less on their own account than on account of the pleasure they give to those whom we love. . . . Well shall it be for us, my dear friend, if, recollecting how on the longest habits of the strictest intimacy, and

“On our firmest resolutions,  
The silent and inaudible tread of Death  
Steals like a thief;”

we are seeking to make Him our Friend who “sticketh closer than a brother;” and if, alive to the unstable nature of what men call philosophy, we are striving to become initiated in that heavenly wisdom, the depths of which are to be sounded by no human plummet-line. . . . Do not be long of gratifying me with a letter, and let us often enjoy that sort of spiritual communion, in which minds alone—unembarrassed by the presence of the body—seem to mingle.’

‘30th October 1830.

‘. . . You see I am again moored in this great Babel—within the jurisdiction of the moonlike sun. . . . Our progress has hitherto been wavering and slow, like the forced pace of a “*shuffling* nag” rather than the flight of Pegasus. I trust, however, that when we come to be “sounding on our dim and perilous way,” with a load of anxiety on the mind, I shall duly appreciate and follow your well-timed memento, not to dissolve the pearl of health in the cup of an overweening eagerness. . . . You will probably know of the honour conferred on Professor Sandford last week, viz. that of knighthood. We have some good

reason to suppose that he will not regard the appointment as a mere honorary title ; and after all, perhaps it is chiefly for us to be mindful that the glory of great names can neither clothe an institution with respectability, nor maintain its usefulness, unless attentiveness to their precepts and the self-denying spirit of scholarship animate the students.

‘I have entered on the study of mathematics. Really it seems to be one broad realm of iron and frost. The thought of passing through the class is not unlike the prospect of a journey over glaciers and Alps. But we “reckon without our host,” I daresay, if we lay not our account to meet with difficulties at the commencement of any new pursuit. Yes ; and while filling our heads with the phantasmagoria of these sciences and books, I feel more and more—and I am sure you do the same—that we tread on slippery ground, and that it requires no small share of caution to make our venture safe. My dear Daniel, I cannot avoid the suspicion that every step towards the acquisition of literary knowledge may *possibly* be a retrogression from objects of inconceivably higher concern, and that while the heart is gladdened at the prospect of success, it may unwittingly be endeavouring to “serve two masters.” . . . Dangers, full surely, there are, which, if contracted, may more or less cling to us through life, but from which let us “rejoice together” that by a gracious influence our God can effectually defend us.

‘. . . Though the rabbit is a helpless, amiable, and innocent creature, I doubt not but that it will prove somewhat “troublesome” at times ; yet, after it has confided itself so long to your keeping, it would be almost a violation of the laws of hospitality to maltreat or expel it ! I hope it will gradually become more tractable and grateful ; and indeed,

the gentle usage of such animals is an indication of kindly feelings, at least the diversion is an exercise of humanity ; and in these days when men take a licence for wantonly inflicting pain on poor animals, this humanity is almost a virtue. You recollect Cowper's three leverets. . . . I trust that, though distant from you, I shall yet live in your recollection,—I shall add, in *your prayers*. Such a remembrance is greatly needed, and will ever be highly esteemed, and gladly returned by, my dear Daniel, yours most affectionately,

‘J. R.’

‘26th Jan. 1831.

‘. . . For my own part, although the good-natured old countenance of snow-crowned Christmas is exceedingly desirable, its smiles of ease and relaxation have something of the same effect on me that the reading of a novel has. The fictions of the novel *may perhaps* answer well enough for lounging away an hour on a sunny afternoon ; they *may be* a very good subject to talk about ; but they scarcely make the student go and sit down “heart and hand” to his work. He would rather go back again and lounge—and talk that day—and the next day—and the day after that. I am aware that you are fairly out of the way of such a misfortune, though I am so subject to it. I fear I have yet to learn the rudiments of firmness.

‘The full tide of excitement will have again set in with you. It has so with us. It is a tide of words and phrases “signifying little ;” and yet we must just let ourselves be drifted along by it. How desirable to be in such a state of feeling that we shall be neither elated by success, nor fretted by disappointment.

‘ . . . I intended to tell you some things about a certain odd character with whom I have become acquainted of late. He is of the seed of Abraham—a Jewish rabbi of the tribe of Levi. I have commenced the study of Hebrew with him; but I have sometimes a *tête-à-tête* with him on *other subjects* for hours. Alas! if the heart were to be mended without any regard to the Spirit’s agency, these poor “lost sheep of the house of Israel” might be the last on whom we needed bestow our pains.’

His letters at this period to his brother Andrew are of course less formal.

‘ Glasgow, Nov. 10, 1831.

‘ Surely the tendency to run into extremes is itself an extreme. At least if you saw the motley groups, that “hold their petty parliaments, and say their little speeches, and move their little motions,” in the college courts every hour of the day just now, asserting their respective claims and privileges, and struggling against what they style violation, you would make yourself merry at the expense of their oratorical valour. Cockburn and Hume are undoubtedly to be the leading candidates. There is still a faction of ultra principles —puffing and blowing like the frog in the fable to make herself like an ox. It is not for me to prophesy, but the probabilities are on the side of Cockburn. “Questionless” (as —— would say) he is a gentleman of splendid and well-earned reputation.

‘ . . . The annual Temperance Convocation takes place on the first of December. The preparations are great, and they mean to have a concentration of influential names—a galaxy of talent. Please come and see. . . . Mr. S. preached the

monthly discourse on Monday evening. There was a great cluster of the clergy among the audience. I will not say that he did not "bring against them a railing accusation." I think he said enough to disarm the most wrong-headed Philistine. "The most noxious, loathsome reptile that pollutes the ground it crawls upon is a lovely and respectable creature compared with the slave of strong drink. He degrades himself far beneath the dignity of a beast that perisheth." So much for a sample. . . . Tell me how you are all tugging at the Temperance oar.'

' . . . Now what have I to tell you other or better than that there is with a vengeance free discussion of "jesting Pilate's" query: "What is truth?" now. There was so on Monday night. Could my wishes have been seconded by the fabled cap of Fortunatus, I would have had you transported to the spot where I was—delighted and penetrated and subdued by the savour that was coming from off that platform. . . .

'We are likely to have some rare Voluntary and Temperance concerns at that time (the Synod). . . . Dr. Brown will be elected beyond a doubt, and what a magnificent man he is! He gave us a rare assemblage of excellencies and beauties on the day of our recent sacramental occasion here. Solid and brilliant and exquisite. If he be promoted I doubt not but that on his account "the thanksgiving of many shall redound to the glory of God." ' . . .

As his first session at college approached its close, we find him deplored, as was like him, the 'petty jealousies and heartburnings in which the students became immersed—each repining at the success of an

antagonist—each blessing himself if others miscarried.' He regretted the 'feelings dictated by envy—"at once the justest and most unjust of passions,"'—as being 'like so many gnats fixing themselves upon the soul.'

In a spirit similar to this, and unlike the usual views of youth, he remarks, elsewhere, at the same period: 'We shall very fatally err, I think, in involving ourselves in the mazes of opinion or the heats of controversial warfare.' How characteristic all this is of the spirit of his life, those who knew him best can testify.

He wrote: 'I was asked recently if I really meant to be a minister of the gospel, and my answer was, that I would need to keep "silence," as there was "in heaven for the space of half-an-hour," before I could give a satisfactory reply.' It was certainly his secret wish, but he doubted his fitness for it. He realized that it needed a deep acquaintance with one's own heart, and an influential acquaintance with God the Saviour, to feed the flock 'which He hath purchased with His own blood,' and he wanted evidence that God had need of him.

This deep acquaintance with his own heart and with God the Saviour was largely given to him, through the exercises of a sensitive spirit, under the teaching of the Divine One, and by the discipline of God's providence, in the years that followed, that he might be qualified to be 'a workman' who would 'rightly divide the word of truth.' Of this period we

have happily a record in his own words, upon which what follows of his experience during the next eight years is chiefly based.

Although, as is seen from the foregoing letters, etc., his leanings from his childhood were unmistakeably towards God and things spiritual, it seems clear that up till his sixteenth year he had not such a grasp of saving truth, nor such a sense of Divine forgiveness, as satisfied his own mind; and that he was greatly troubled about it. He knew *theoretically* the answer to the question, 'How shall man be just with God?' but had no persuasion that he was in such a case as this, and was longing, like most young souls in concern, 'for a conscious touch of the Divine new-creating hand,' and for some firm and satisfactory basis for his hope.

During the spring of 1832, both when at college in Glasgow and afterwards at home, it is believed that he passed through such an experience as brought him to the discovery that it was vain to look *within* for grounds of his hope of salvation, and that his trust must be outward and upward.

The ministry of the Baptist—the forerunner of Christ, and preparer of His way—led to conviction of sin, and to the earnest question, 'What shall we do then?' A subject of such preparatory teaching, James Robertson was brought to see himself 'a sinner and led captive by Satan in the vexatious stirrings of self-love, pride, unbelief, formality in devotion,

and the atheistical principle in his heart, as truly as if he had been guilty of gross sins.' While he had the esteem of friends around for his apparently consistent Christian character, and while he was seeking the living God 'with all his heart,' and hoping in His mercy, he was making growing discoveries of his own unworthiness, of richly-merited wrath, and of his inability to *do* more than weep over the worldliness of an evil heart; but this sentence of death in himself taught him effectually henceforth not to trust in himself, but in Him who not only wept over Lazarus dead, but spoke the word that brought the dead to life.

All the humbling experience of what he called this 'solemn critical era,' made it 'unchanging Marah' to him for a time. All was probably aggravated by partial infirmity of health and dread of death in an unprepared state.

He tried to oppose his wrong views of God by God's statements about Himself, who said, I am the 'Help' of self-destroyed Israel; till the joyful words of the Psalmist began to find an echo in his heart: 'Blessed is the man (oh, the blessednesses of the man!) whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.'

His argument was:

'My sins "reach unto the clouds," but "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens;" my necessities drive me to the God whose mercy sweetly constrains me to come.'

In that ‘evangelical penitence’ which ‘consists,’ as an old divine says, ‘in having the heart broken *for* sin and *from* sin,’ we have good ground to believe that he learned for himself what was the spirit of his teaching to anxious ones afterwards, that ‘while in our contrition we bemoan ourselves, we may shed the tear on the Saviour’s breast.’

‘A seeking sinner and a seeking Saviour will soon meet.’ Taught so deeply his need, willing to be the new-created ‘workmanship’ of God—these leading to, and issuing in, the gradual seeing of the truth that met his need, with its message of a possible, great, complete salvation,—no wonder it became the joyful, irrepressible theme of his life. It was a persuasion graven on his experience ‘with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond,’ and it found favourite utterance in his ministrations in the oft-repeated saying: ‘Does light suit the eye? does music suit the ear? does the key fit the lock? not half so well as this blessed gospel fits every chamber of the human heart.’

Brought low enough to accept salvation as a ‘gift,’ he knew well how to place himself side by side with those who, in after years, were the objects of his loving concern, and with an entire absence of all air of superiority in addressing a ‘fellow-sinner,’ to make his appeal on the old footing: ‘We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, *even as they.*’

It is told that on one occasion it was his use of

the word ‘fellow-sinner’ in his sermon that was the means of leading to a saving change in one of his audience.

Emerging from doubt and conflict into a believing hope of full and final conquest, we find him now saying: ‘When the foe is foiled and repulsed, and utterly confounded for ever, all the comfort of the victory is ours, but all the glory shall be Thine, blessed Lord, world without end.’

‘The worth of a visit of Christ’s salvation is beyond all rhetoric to tell,’ but this he knew—and often the testimony was heard from his lips, in such words as these: ‘It can sweeten a bitter cup and make a sweet cup the sweeter; and in the experience of a multitude, which no man can number, has it smoothed and sweetened the passage through the valley of humiliation, and the valley of death, into the eternity beyond.’

In June 1832, at the age of sixteen, he saw his way, with much evident distrust of self, to venture the open confession of Christ, by joining the church of his parents in Stirling, thus publicly and solemnly avowing the Lord to be his God. It was no light occasion to him. The consequences and bearings of it were not done with him when the solemnities were past, but stretched into eternity, and he reckoned himself, more than ever, in the hands of a faithful Creator and Saviour, whom it was *now his purpose to serve in the Gospel of His Son.*

His ‘home and its delightful retirement’ was much prized by him, as yielding most ample facilities for improvement. His absence never estranged or weaned him from the domestic circle, to which his affections clung with increasing earnestness ; and he delighted in its store of strengthening and sweetening considerations.

At the end of his college session he was very ready for its refreshment and invigoration, of which he stood greatly in need ; but far from spending too much of his leisure on his necessary restful preparation for future labour, he, with his habitual shrinking from the misuse of time, set at once about carving out present work for himself and others.

Whilst he valued and honoured his parents the more as life advanced, they, on their part, showed their implicit confidence in him, by committing to his hands, when at home, the education and general charge of the younger members of the family, as has been already indicated. With anxiety to turn the young lives entrusted to his care to the highest account, days and hours were conscientiously laid out for honest work.

It was from his old master that he took his model, and growing experience gradually taught him how to adapt the Tillicoultry methods to his own nature and youth.

It was not by natural instinct alone and untutored, that he knew so well how to touch sympathetic chords

in young hearts in ministerial days, often by a few words, even on casual meeting, opening floods of thought and feeling that so frequently issued in untold good. This rare power was, under God, due in large measure to the early self-training of a loving heart, longing, like Abraham, 'O that Ishmael might live before Thee !'

From the records of one of his youthful charge—who died comparatively young, and whose devout spirit runs through his diary—we gather that he and they were then, among other things, studying natural history, reading Homer in Greek, and Genesis in Hebrew, Shakespeare, etc. ; that they were occupied, on Saturdays, in learning, for recital next day, parts of such works as M'Laurin's Sermon on 'Glorying in the Cross of Christ,' Hannah More on 'Prayer,' Bishop Horne on 'Solitude,' Dr. Waugh on 'Contentment,' Hall, the 'Olney Hymns,' etc. They would read two of Timothy Dwight's sermons, such as 'Probation,' and 'The Fall of Man,' 'to be examined on.'

A brief account would also be given, on the Sabbath evenings, of such *voluntary* religious reading as went on during the week. One day in the week was set apart for letter - writing, each choosing a different correspondent. These letters, before being despatched, were read aloud in the family, at breakfast, or before evening worship, or at some other suitable time.

It was the aim of the young teacher to try to put the children on the practice of devout prayer, in

the hope that it would soon become delightful enough to them. ‘Many children neglect the duty’ (he says), ‘not from any ill-disposition, but because nobody takes care to teach them in it.’

Whatever his circle might be, small or large, at home or abroad, it was his to seek to use his influence wisely in diffusing a distaste for evil and a relish for good. He considered that the smallness or insignificance of it in no way diminished his responsibility; nor did he allow himself to justify indolence under pretext of diffidence.

Many of the first principles of the oracles of God, he was teaching, as the modest professor of chemistry did his art, ‘in order that he might learn them.’

There is evidence during those student years of abundant and varied reading. His ‘notes of reading’ contain long lists of books by authors of known excellence, along with remarks on what he finds in them, and a decided expression of opinion regarding them. In these lists the religious element predominates, but is by no means exclusive. It seems to have been from his own reading that he induced the younger members of the family not only to commit to memory, as has been said, but also to write select passages, which he considered of greatest value, and worthy to be impressed on young minds. Thus were they accustomed to ‘high thinking,’ while they might be scarcely aware of the loftiness of the region—not to speak of the superiority of style—with which their

everyday exercises were making them familiar from their earliest years.

At Greenhill there was little or no coercion by the parents in matters of *detail*. Broad principles were laid down for guidance, and it was thought this should be sufficient. In all the surroundings of that quiet country home, there was an unusually large preponderance of good, and consequently the children, while they remained there, had little knowledge of the evil that is in the world ; they were not warned *against* books or persons, but were accustomed to draw all the good they could from all.

It is the common fate of voyagers to meet with a storm. In December of this year (1832), James had an attack of typhus fever at home. But he had been able to enter the storm with some degree of composure, saying, 'It is the Lord.'

He used often to refer to this event afterwards with great interest. He told how, when at the crisis, in the deepest state of prostration, unable to speak, while his friends were gathered round the bed weeping, and looking for the end, he felt as if roused out of the final sleep that seemed creeping on, by the sound of the '*creeping* of the doctor's shoes on the stair.' The doctor's entry to the chamber changed the scene. 'Hoot, he's got the turn !' were the lively words that were to the patient like something that helped him to a new hold of life—so far as his con-

sciousness was concerned—and the point from which he rallied slowly.

It may have been from this experience that he learned the sensitiveness of one in such a state, and how much might be endured (and, in his later visits to the suffering, he was persuaded often *was* endured) if the cruel wrong were committed of too free and unsympathetic speech in a dying chamber; as if the poor invalid, unable to give signs of consciousness, might not be keenly aware of all that was passing—more keenly perhaps than usual. It was always a delicate point with him that whether one was *sure* of the patient's unconsciousness or not, nothing should be said but what would fall with perfect appropriateness on the dying ear.

He returned to his college work in March 1833, after three months' absence, finally parting with it in May; after which he took the first step that *formally committed* him to the gospel ministry. In August of this year he went to the Divinity Hall of the Secession Church in Edinburgh, for the first time. There he remarked with delight the harmony and brotherly kindness that subsisted among the students—‘no paltry jealousies to embitter friendship, or to set friends at variance.’

Previous to this he had repeated attacks of illness, and after the close of the session, in the beginning of October, while suffering from severe spasms of pain—the earlier stages of the heart affection that

clung to him through life, and ultimately caused his death—he repaired to Rothesay to recruit, and to prepare also for the fatigues that awaited him, in what he described as ‘the delightful course’ that lay before him. There for a time he was worse rather than better, and it even seemed doubtful whether he might recover. He returned home, however, with some revival of strength.

A fellow-student and life-long friend, the Rev. John Haddin, furnishes some reminiscences of this period of Mr. Robertson’s life:—

‘My acquaintance with him began at Glasgow College, when we were students in the logic class, under Professor Buchanan. This was in the session of 1829–30, when the Professor was yet new to the chair, and his enthusiasm in full flow. The class was a brilliant one. The Professor stated, some years afterwards, in a letter appended to the funeral sermon on the death of the Rev. Morell M’Kenzie, who was drowned in the wreck of the *Pegasus*, that it was the most distinguished class which, up to that time, he had taught. Mr. M’Kenzie was a student of that year, and the most eminent in the senior section. The most distinguished in the junior was Mr. Halley, a student of the Established Church, who died before he obtained licence; an interesting memoir of whom was written by the Rev. William Arnot. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Tait, was also a member of the class, and was then as distinguished for his solid judgment, calm spirit, and prudent action, as in after years.

‘The place which Mr. Robertson held in the classes was

good. Not having been with him in any of these save Logic and Mathematics, my knowledge is particular only in regard to these. His course in Logic secured him one of the higher prizes there.

‘As a student, two things struck me as specially characteristic, and sources of his power. These were the beauty of his diction, and the richness and melody of his voice. When he read an essay, the language appeared to me so refined, and elegant, and apposite, and flowed forth in a stream so soft and musical, that I was quite enchanted. Nothing, I thought, could be more exquisite, and I placed him at the highest point as an eloquent speaker.

‘As an evidence of the spell thrown over me, I voted him a prize in the mathematical class, and found myself, to my surprise, the only student who did so! My preference must have arisen from the charming *way* in which he repeated the demonstrations of Euclid, for he was not possessed of mathematical talent, and I was not then so intimate with him as to be blinded by partiality. The voice did the whole —so telling, that it could render even the propositions of Euclid musical, and convert their bald sentences into eloquence!

‘That which led me to yield myself to his influence, and seek his friendship, was that which, in after years, made him many friends. It was the intensity of his sympathy, and the frankness of his manner. When we first met, I was the most shy and awkward of youths. Nothing could have been more exclusive and repellent than my appearance and action. Think, then, what must have been the effect on such a one, when a fellow-student approached him with easy manner, and smiling countenance, and spoke to him as

if he were a brother! This was our first introduction to one another, as I stood in the college court, apart from all others. From that time, when we met, he spoke as if we had known each other from childhood. The sudden and close union I ascribe to his quick perception and instinctive appreciation of the desires of others. To observe a want, ever produced in him a wish to supply it.

‘This sympathy was his most distinguished characteristic. In this he was unsurpassed by any minister with whom it has been my lot to come into contact. One was sensible of it on his first salutation, and all subsequent conversation deepened the impression. There are many who will think with you, resolve with you, act with you; but the number of those who will *feel* with you, and whose emotions will respond to yours, is small. Mr. Robertson was one who not only thought and willed, but *felt* with those who appealed to him. Not only so, but he felt more than he either thought or willed. While his judgment and will might but slightly accord with yours, and be but feebly expressed, his feeling was decided, and strong, and fully manifested. The effect of his sympathy was to attach many to him—some in a high degree—“grappling them to him with hooks of steel.”

‘All that he afterwards became, when he stood forth a prominent and active minister, was in him as a student, not only in germ, but in marked development. That which first and most forcibly impressed me was his piety, which was at once commanding and constantly manifested. The stream of faith and holy feeling was not more full and flowing, his devotion more reverential and fervent, nor his exertions more varied and active, in his advanced years,

than in his opening ones. It was the entire surrender of himself to God at the first, in heart and soul, that enabled him to maintain such a bright and consistent course.

‘My first visit to Greenhill was in December 1833. During the whole of the time Mr. Robertson was labouring under serious illness, so that usually he could scarcely speak above a whisper. His mind was full of reverence and godly fear, and at the same time of love and confidence. We had much pleasant and profitable intercourse.

‘At this time, his desire and intention had been to devote himself to the foreign mission field, and it had been his wish to seek qualification for it by voluntary home mission work in his own neighbourhood. Now he feared the prospect was closed, and he must relinquish the fondly cherished desire. Even the children of the district, among whom he had taught Divine things on Sabbath evenings, with evidence that his labour had not been in vain, were denied their wonted privilege.’

Other reminiscences given by this friend, as well as Mr. Robertson’s own notes at the time, show that he was pondering deeply the varying phases of his spiritual experience, and was most seriously exercised about the discoveries he made in his faithful, earnest self-examination, during his time of waiting and suffering at home. It was something far from habitual cheer that he derived from it: he sometimes feared, indeed, that he was still unregenerate:—

‘Surely, were I a new creature, my desires would not be so vagrant. What repugnance in the habitual dis-

position of my heart to God! How unsuitable the posture and demeanour of my spirit to the great truths that have been so long hovering in it! I could run away from myself.

‘My course of conversation is not shaped according to what is lodged in my mind. I have a rational certainty of the truth, strong enough to overcome the objections of judgment, but not sufficient to destroy the corrupt inclinations of the heart of unbelief. Oh, this unbelief, this obstinate unpersuadableness!

‘Self-condemned and self-abased, we throw ourselves at Thy feet, even were it a peradventure whether Thou wouldest pity us, even were it a supposable thing that we should perish there. We venture our souls upon Thee, with an unconditional submission to the methods of Thy grace; and we make use of the blood of our Redeemer as our only plea.

‘Rather let our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth, than that, through a wretched heart of unbelief, we should reject and affront Thee, O Saviour, as if Thou meantest to mock and delude us by offers of salvation which Thou art not infinitely willing to bestow. That be far from Thee, and may the impious suspicion be far from us. We believe and are sure that we cannot make too large demands on Thy mercy to pardon, and Thy grace to help us.’

From these two sources we also learn that he tried to strengthen his good resolutions by solemn personal covenant with God; and yet that, ‘finding his resolutions unstable as water,’ and dissatisfied with all, he ‘turned to Him who could shape him

entirely anew.' They show that his investigations led him more and more to distrust himself, and to centre his confidence on the Great Covenant-Keeper; working out for him, we doubt not, under God's teaching, that shrinking from too much of the 'subjective' in religion, that relinquishment of the hope of drawing comfort from anything within, that necessity of going out of himself for what would enlighten and cheer, afterwards so characteristic of his ministry.

And what have they not been the means of working out for others, under a teaching that always—consciously or unconsciously to *them*—pointed from darkness to light, from confusion, and sin, and misery in self, to a Saviour outside of us—distinct—separate from us, who has done a work *for* us, and is able and willing to do a work *within* us, if we will but keep looking to Him and expecting from Him, and cease the vain attempt of saying to our own 'empty cisterns,' 'Spring up, O well;' a teaching that never taught wanderers in darkness and sorrow to seek the Divine in the human—in self; but to seek it where it is—in the glorious Person outside of self, and so become in the finding and the beholding of Him, 'changed into the same image, by the Lord the Spirit.'

## C H A P T E R I V.

### Days of Waiting.

1833-1835.

THE spring of 1834, which brought with it gradual recovery, brought also a new sorrow in the death of his former Sabbath-school teacher, Miss Jessie Lewis of Plean. Many years after, and within a fortnight of his death, he spoke to a friend of the great debt which spiritually he owed to her, saying: 'Did I never tell you about that?' and then went on to relate how, through God's mercy, he received from her the first sacred impressions he could recall, of the tremendous importance of the gospel, and the necessity of a real, vital union with the Saviour it reveals; and how, in after years, he used to go and sit on her grave, and think about it with grateful emotion.

When 'Hall' time came round this year, his health did not admit of his attending it, and he felt this keenly. His companions were compelled to leave him behind like the poet's man on a desert island, who

'Never heard a sound so dismal as their parting oars;'

but their subsequent visits to him, with their gospel voyages of discovery, and maps of what was, as yet to him, a *terra incognita* of theology would, he expected, be some compensation for the loss.

His being shut out from his loved employment, with almost no prospect of ever reaching his goal, gave scope to his ingenuity in devising varied plans for service in the very short span of life that seemed likely to be allotted to him, whereby he early began to gather that rich experience in private and personal dealing that distinguished his work, and rendered it so fruitful. With the one aim ever before him, he learned to be skilful in leading to higher things through natural channels, carefully following the windings of the mind he was dealing with, whilst always giving glimpses of truth that led to the revelation of self to self, and prepared for the reception of the Christ he preached. In these things we find much that resembled the natural and yet varied ways of his Master with those to whom He came laden with blessing, as in the case of the woman at the well. Like Him, too, he sometimes asked little favours that he might be the means of giving greater ones, and getting inlet for them: 'Give me to drink'—'He would have given thee living water.'

About this time, a valued servant of the family was leaving Greenhill to be married. James and his mother accompanied her for a short distance along

the road. On bidding her farewell, he slipped a letter into the basket she carried in her hand, and which has been kept by her as a sacred treasure ever since. We subjoin some extracts:—

‘Considering the present to be a crisis in your life, I cannot stand upon ceremony, or satisfy myself, without expressing my best wishes for your welfare, and especially for the security of your everlasting interests, which is *the Grand Concern.*’

‘May I ask you with all the humility of a fellow-sinner (who has nothing between himself and destruction but the blood of the Lamb) what *your* prospects are for that eternal condition of being, to which this shifting life is but a passage?’

‘Soon shall you and I exchange, not houses, but worlds. On your reception, and on mine, of the Friend of sinners, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, depends our everlasting weal or woe.’

‘Have you taken refuge under the shadow of His dear cross? Have the worth of the soul and the Saviour, the possible nearness of death, and the weight of eternal things, affected your heart, in some degree suitably to the magnitude of these objects. I know there are multitudes, *multitudes!* who are cheating themselves—placing their hopes of salvation in the harmlessness of their outward behaviour, and the fidelity with which they discharge the duties of their situation, and having repeated year by year the self-delusion, sink into the grave! How can I be otherwise than anxious that *you* should go forth from us, not merely exemplary for industrious and sober and amiable manners, but with warm,

enlightened, and serious piety, and adorned with all the beauties of holiness.'

This intense desire, 'that by all means he might save some,' continued to be the habit of his life; and not a few of the class referred to can recall with tender gratitude the opportunities he never lost, of dropping, in season and out of season, the pointed word, always fitted to arrest, and call to serious thought. His method was once quaintly characterized by an old servant, when driving a ministerial friend from Greenhill to the station.

'Do ye ken oor Maister Jeems, sir?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' was the reply.

'Aweel, ye canna be lang wi' him in a gig, *till he staps up your braith.*'

About this time we find him planning an association in aid of missions, when missions were less general than now, conscious that it was quite possible for contemporary criticism to call him 'visionary.' All through his life, callous unbelief was often disposed to call his hopefulness and high aspirations for man visionary. It seemed an unwelcome intrusion on the indifferent sleep in which too large a proportion of professing Christendom lies. But his hope for man lay not in man himself, but in his unfailing belief in what *God* could do for him, through the gospel, by His good Spirit.

Those who had known God's power themselves welcomed the cheer and stimulus his presence brought, and renewed their efforts and prayers for their fellow-men, with revived faith and hope.

In 1835 he wrote some things for the press, that he might proclaim his favourite theme by pen, if not by preaching.

A tract entitled 'Look Up' is one of these, and another—written in winter during the languid hours of convalescence from two years' illness—is a meditation on 'The Benefits of Affliction to the Young.' The points illustrated in this tract may here be given, as indicating the lessons which he had learned in his time of weakness. He says of affliction in youth that it

- ‘ 1. Hides pride from the young.
- ‘ 2. Corrects their extravagant expectations.
- ‘ 3. Preserves them from sin, and teaches them its exceeding sinfulness.
- ‘ 4. Has often been the means of conversion in youth.
- ‘ 5. Endears to the young the word of grace, the throne of grace, and the sympathy of Jesus.
- ‘ 6. Invigorates the graces of the young Christian.’

The peculiar irksomeness of a state of non-employment, his bodily trouble and mental exercise drove him at first to this writing for the press, while 'the absolute impossibility of subsisting without some useful work' continued to recommend it. The weariness

ness that worried him hunted him into the use of the pen—his only remedy.

He writes : 'We read that Zachariah stayed out the days of his ministration, though he was both dumb and deaf. Though he ceased to be able to speak, he did not cease to minister. He did not take his dumbness as a dismission. He knew that God could accept his hand and heart, though his tongue was tied.' It was in this spirit that he accepted his chastening, and learned, when under it, that it was good to go on with his work as far as he was able, and never to take any slight occasion for withdrawing his neck from the yoke of the Lord. He was still blessed with some powers of usefulness, that excluded all excuse for indolence, and these he would use as he could.

The death (in August 1835) of a sister, endeared to all in no ordinary degree, touched him much. He drew up a detailed statement of the scenes and facts of her deathbed, to gratify the wishes of survivors, and console them. The narrative was carefully kept, and read and re-read by younger members of the family.

This sister's death was an example, imprinting itself indelibly on the minds of the other young people, of the power of Christianity, enabling her to display the calmest heroism in the most trying moments, carrying her through a long series of sufferings with dignified composure and unaltered

sweetness, and scattering the horrors of the sepulchre, so that she could look into it undismayed. ‘Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.’

‘The darts of death, vary as they may, all come from His armoury, His quiver. Wonderful, that we should reap so much encouragement from those who, in the awful act of dissolution, need to be themselves so much encouraged. Christ in His agony had “an angel from heaven strengthening Him.”’

This autumn he attended the Divinity Hall in Edinburgh, but seems to have come home from it early, and rather downcast—not having ‘nerve enough to face the rough world’—apparently concluding that his only wisdom was in quiet, and that home was still the only eligible place for him. ‘A vain, vexing, weary world is the beaten way to a better,’ and ‘God has His own ways of saying to His children, as He did to Abraham, “Get thee out unto a land that I will show thee.”’

The pleasure of meeting with fellow-students was balanced by the pain of contrast; and it was no wonder that, gazing on the hopeless wreck of schemes long cherished with passionate affection, he should be ‘filled with silent anguish. The nightshade was twining about the rosebuds of his best hopes.’ But it was ‘not a new experience. Moses, at the promised land knew it: David, in regard to the building of the temple.’

‘Feeling, like fire, is a good servant, but a bad master.’

‘Oh, for a well-governed sensibility, touched and purified with “a live coal from off the altar!”’

Yet it was with unjealous joy and thankfulness to God that he could see others go forth with devotion to preach Christ among the heathen, while the work—‘the most delightful of all employments’—was meantime wrested from his hands.

His chief infirmities at this time were, he says, weakness of voice and want of locomotive energy; and he adds: ‘Natural evil, with God’s blessing, is moral good. The nearest way to my wishes, God being judge, may not always be the best; and the fruit I covet will be much more rich and wholesome when ripe, than if I should seize and devour it while green. “He that believeth maketh not haste.” My days of inaction the Lord knows them—that is with Him, appointed by Him. None but He knows what is good for a man. A child may cry for a sharp instrument, or long to get up a steep ladder,—may wish for holidays and dainties, when a wise and good parent knows it needs schooling and medicine.’

After this there had been some recovery of strength, and still more on discontinuing the work of teaching at home. He was yet able to visit for Christian ends in the neighbouring villages, and to hold occasional meetings too.

His dealing with people at the close of his services

was a natural outcome of *his kind* of work, from the beginning. It did not belong specially to the later part of his life, when others were doing it more generally ; nor yet only to his ordained ministry as a whole, but it was already a feature of his early meetings in 'The Camp' (a colliers' hamlet near his home) and elsewhere, while he was yet a lad. Neither was it the forced undiscriminating attack of an undiscerning nature on all sorts of people alike. In his meeting, his quick, sympathetic eye would detect the concerned sinner ; and, on coming out, he would find him loitering about the road, and, in the easiest and most natural way possible, he would give him an outlet for what he wanted to say. The man could not but feel he would understand and help him.

In visiting the sick and apparently dying, it was characteristic of him, from his early years, to avoid on such occasions any cruel freedom in expressing alarm, or in talking of death. To use his own words, he had 'no right to number any person's days, even when they seemed most probably numbered ;' and yet, if warning were needed, there would be no lack of faithfulness, and his aim would be 'to do it through Scripture passages, which do not shock, without infusing the balm of Gilead to heal the wounds they expose, and to open the door of hope to a better world, while the ties to this were being loosened.'

As health improved, his outside work increased, and the scene of his loving labours sometimes extended to

Stirling, which was five miles from his home. The interval between services on Sabbath was used in this way to good purpose; but week-day and Sabbath found him in the same favourite employment, now trying to rouse the self-flatterer out of false security, and receiving thanks for it, now ministering to the sick and dying. He records with concern the case of one who would go ‘no further with him than the “*if* argument” (“*if* we could pronounce on the safety of our soul, *if* we could read our title clear to the inheritance of the saints in light”)’ with whom he left Hall’s *Farewell to Life*, hoping she might ‘*taste* and *see* that God is good.’ Other dying ones he was seeking to convince that a main ingredient in preparedness for death is the pardon of sin, and that the grand object should be to get at, not a favourable, so much as a correct notion of their spiritual condition; not to get relief from the fears of guilt by any means, but the truly Scriptural means; while his heart would be gladdened, on his way home, in talking with a poor old woman whom he joined on the road, who had scarcee where to lay her head, and yet seemed to be rich in faith, and beautified with God’s salvation.

A worthy miner in the neighbourhood, Sandy Stevenson (regarding whom a memorial sketch was ultimately written, entitled ‘The Pious Collier’), was brought about this time to his deathbed. Mr. Robertson visited him often, and prized his character and Christianity much, quoting of him as he approached

his end, John Newton's saying, 'He is in great danger—of going to heaven,' his evidences being bright for that better country, and his sun becoming bigger at its setting. Many an hour was spent at Sandy's, his visits to him being always found profitable to himself. 'It is a place privileged beyond the common walks of life—the chamber in which a dying Jacob is waiting for God's salvation. . . . The word of the Lord has tried him, and if the world marvels to see how Christians are sustained and consoled in their penury and pain, the reason is, it cannot see one-half. It can see the burdens, but not the Everlasting Arms underneath them. It can see the tokens of sorrow, but none of the comforts of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in their hearts. Strange as it may seem, I believe this suffering saint in his tedious confinement, with few of the alleviations which affluence or friendship supply, is the happiest man among us.' Some of Mr. Robertson's letters to Sandy have been carefully preserved.

'Nicholson Street, Glasgow, March 30, 1833.

'My dear Friend, . . . You feel your strength, I trust, recruiting much, especially when all about you is becoming rapidly redolent of spring. Oh, for a new spring-time in our souls! Truly the light of life is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the Sun of Righteousness. Under what is termed "the hiding of God's countenance," alas what distractions and what torturing forebodings! The "horror of great darkness" falls upon us. "How great is that darkness!" How great the peace-giving influence then of "good

hope through grace," of the voice of love and mercy from Calvary, "Peace be still." The quaking spirit is hushed. It banishes every "fear which hath torment."

"If our eye and heart are not gladdened, my dear friend, by the tide of melting light and love which surrounds and emanates from the throne of the Lamb, the cause verily is not in the love or in the light. A faithful God never withdraws from us, but when sin or unbelief withdraws us from Him.

"With the exception of some considerable strengthlessness, which makes the chariot wheels drag on accordingly, I may call myself quite well. How forcibly does returning health summon me to gratitude for the mercy of it! I have been both smitten and smiled upon. May I never "forget His works," as Israel did, after He had "compassed them about with songs of deliverance!"

"Temperance matters here far more stagnant than they ought to be—not that there is any flagrant backsliding or declension, but we are sleeping within our old limits, and lie on us for it!

"Church parties are keeping each other in hot water. Surely now they might have free trade in discussing principles, without infringing on charity, without cherishing a particle of ill-will against those who hold them. They might be "purging out the old leaven" when they are wasting their breath on revilings. Stand by thyself yonder, come not near me, for I am sounder than thou. Oh, come the day that shall do away discords, and make it the watchword of the whole brotherhood of professors: "I am of Christ!"

"I fondly hope that no root of bitterness shall spring up on this account to trouble you, or mar your harmony on the Saturday evenings. I beg to be very affectionately re-

membered to those who still take counsel with you, and please myself with the confidence that the relish of all is heightening for the delight of such "solemn groups and sweet societies," and that a taste is appearing to be imparted to those who may have been too much strangers to the experience of their excellency. Let us "set our hope in God," and go forward, forgetting the things that are behind.

" You will, I hope, my good friend, take this (scrawl as it is) as a token of the sincerity with which I am,—Yours, with respect and love,

J. R.'

The others are pencil notes from Greenhill, when it would seem that both Sandy and he were under the rod.

' . . . Does not the blessed Hand which lays the cross on, also supply unction for the bruises it occasions? Let us not be discouraged because of the way Zionward. Yes, it is a waste land, but "God can spread a table for us." We have the Manna, the Rock, and the Ark. And should there be but a scanty portion of the blessings that perish in the using allotted us, need we be ashamed of treading in the footsteps of the "Lord of all," who, though He had more right than we have to better entertainment in His own world, was worse provided for than birds or foxes; and who, in illustrating the sorrows and privations of His own life, was not ashamed to call us brethren. Yonder, not here, is your recompense, your centre, your resting-place, your home. . . . '

Again—

' . . . I was in the very act, when yours came to hand, of

sending you some *Missionary Chronicles*. . . . You will see a little of the Lord's doings among the nations—of the moral miracles He is working upon such as *were* bleeding to death of their spiritual wounds. It is a period when great things are expected, and great things attempted. We must “tarry beside the stuff,” but we may wield the sword of the Spirit. Yes, *we* are but dust, and can bear but little, and it would be something of which, we may presume, we would never lose the relish all our days, if it were consistent with His holy pleasure to remove the stroke by which we are consumed. But, whatever betide, He has pledged His word to apportion the burden to the strength. This is our comfort, and this our confidence, that He “looks down from the height of His sanctuary to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed soon to die.”

‘Ay, our friends are telling off apace, from the land of the dying to the land of the living. “’Tis the survivor dies!” . . . “Dear in God’s sight is the death of His saints.” Their works of faith and mercy are said to follow them; but it is the righteousness of Immanuel that, as it were, goes before them, to open the gates of the celestial city. The good Lord lead us to learn the lesson which others are dying to give. . . .’

‘. . . I rejoice in the proofs enough which you have, and which you give, that the Lord is with you of a truth. More and more do I see how blessed a thing it is to be taught heavenly wisdom, though in the roughest school, to “be made partakers of His holiness.” I see it, but in how unspeakably small a measure do I attain! I am abased in dust and ashes at the idea that the furnace fails to purify,

and the rod to drive folly from this heart of unbelief ; and I entreat a share in your intercessions, lest there should be ground for the question : How “have ye suffered so many things in vain ?” . . . On the subject of the prosperous state of our Aaron-and-Hur Society, I have reason to be of a doubtful mind. We are faint, I fear, and dissipated, and shorn of our strength. I long to see you, to tell you without suspicion or reserve what roots of bitterness have sprung up to trouble us. I long for the time when you shall be among us again, to quicken our languishing love, and teach us to steer steady. Our sin is, that our prayers come not in enlargement and in confidence up to the amount of the Divine promise, and to the amount of influence in Jesus’ name. From all jealousies except a godly jealousy over our own hearts, and for the honour of our Saviour, may the good Lord deliver us. . . .’

Another miner, James Nisbet, a disciple of Sandy’s, followed him to the grave soon after, but by a more sudden passage. It is of him Mr. Robertson writes :—

‘After Sandy’s death, his delight seemed to be to spend the interval between services on Sabbath, sitting on the sod that covered him, as if his faith had been “preventing” his own change, and anticipating the ensuing commission. A favourite text he often alluded to, as having sometime broken his fetters, and as descriptive of the triumph of the believer over the sufferings and sins of earth, was : “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” He bore the marks of unfeigned humility, a heart full of love to Christ, and fervent zeal for the salvation of

souls. While employed in his room in the pit, a huge block of coal, which he was loosening from beneath, suddenly gave way, and crushed him to the ground. The alarm was immediately given, but several minutes elapsed before men could be collected in sufficient numbers to extricate him ; and the poor sufferer was so dreadfully injured, that after lingering in intense anguish, but apparent unconsciousness, for eleven hours, he expired.

‘What made him so desirable for this world was just that he was so well prepared for a better. While he lived the world cordially hated him for his piety ; but after his death every tongue bore the language of unbought respect and attachment.’

Mr. Robertson’s younger brother George, who was truly ‘of the same mind’ with himself, was from home. To him he wrote in pencil as follows :—

‘Saturday night, 8 o’clock.

‘If you have tears, my dear George, prepare to shed them now. . . . James Nisbet is gone to join Sandy in a deathless world. You will share with me this sad day’s sorrow, for it is a burden too heavy for my single heart to bear. The whole “Camp” is written desolate to-night of its accustomed joy. Every one is weeping, and “their tears become them, and their grief is just.” . . . The Lord liveth, and blessed be our Rock. The Almighty ever liveth, though the mighty be fallen—they who had power with God and prevailed on our behalf.

‘. . . We will not despair or perplex ourselves about the means of protecting the interests of religion against the enemy and the avenger. . . . Is there not an unfailing

resource in Omnipotence, to which the whole compass of creation is obedient, and which “ calleth things that are not as though they were ”?

‘ James sent me word last night that he would spend an hour with me this afternoon, to talk over some of his plans of doing good. But the first news that reached my ear this morning, when I awoke, was that he had been carried home from the pit in the utmost anguish. I was at his bedside in a little ; but dying was hard work—he hardly recognised any one. . . . It was a *fiery* chariot, but it carried him to heaven. . . . I have taken some of the sweetest counsel with him since you left us last. . . .

‘ Old Rabbie (too) is dead and happit. So are other three who used to frequent your little congregation in Jean’s. . . .’

Having taken notes of Sandy’s life and experience, Mr. Robertson desired Mr. M’Cheyne (then assistant to the Rev. John Bonar, Larbert, and afterwards minister of Dundee) to frame a narrative from them, believing that it might be of much use. Regarding this request Mr. M’Cheyne wrote from Stenhousemuir in September 1836 :—

‘ I was so much interested with the sketch of Alexander Stevenson’s life that I hardly stopped till I got to the end of it. It presents the most graphic picture that I ever saw of a poor collier’s life. How true that one-half the world knows not how the other half lives ! It is peculiarly interesting to me, having been somewhat occupied among that very class of people. And the grand lesson that it teaches me is, that it is the duty of the minister to know the case of every one of his people—to be his intimate guide to

the Saviour. I am somewhat at a loss to trace the beginning of a work of grace in his heart. His seems to be one of those cases (unlike the Philippian jailor) where there is no sudden transition from darkness to marvellous light. The abstaining from secret prayer, even after the beginning of a kind of religious life, is quite a puzzle to me. There is good evidence of a graciously humbled spirit ; but there seems to have been no particular time when he was overpoweringly convinced of sin. In the same way there seems good evidence of a mind looking unto Jesus, and receiving peace only from looking out to Him—to His wounds, and to His obedience ; but I do not find there was any particular time when his eyes were opened of a sudden to see the beauty and fitness of the Saviour. If I look rightly into his case, it is one of those in which God, from time to time, by providential dealings, leads on and on to the knowledge of their lost estate, and to the knowledge of Jesus, without any one point in their life which can be called a time of conversion. Their whole life has been, as it were, one long birth into the world of grace. If this be true, it is very precious, and teaches ministers a thousand lessons. Another remarkable feature is, that no man seems to have been God's instrument, or chief instrument, in turning him to God. He had no spiritual father. God's providence seems to have been the chief instrument. His providences are admirably told, and are exceedingly interesting. . . . I do think it would make a useful tract to print it at some length ; but it would need a pruning hand, or rather to be remodelled. . . .

‘If you know those of his friends that are living, you might let me know their names, that we may not injure them by putting them in print.

‘I was grieved I could see so little of you last evening. Remember the sweet words of Jude 21, “Keep yourself in the love of God”—in His love to you, and then yours will abound to Him; and to Him who alone is able to keep you from falling I commend you and yours.’

Mr. M‘Cheyne was sent abroad soon after this, in connection with the Jewish Mission of his Church, and the constant labours of a busy, but short ministry on his return left him no time to compile the narrative. This was finally done by another hand, that of Mr. Whitecross, author of *Anecdotes on the Shorter Catechism*, etc.

## CHAPTER V.

### The Divinity Student.

1835-1839.

ONE of Mr. Robertson's favourite places of call in Stirling was Jeanie Wilson's. He was wont to call her '*A Lily among Thorns* ;' and many will recognise this title as that of a small memoir from his own hand, which has appeared at different times, in several different forms.

Jeanie belonged to a tribe of gypsies that had their headquarters at Raploch, a village at the foot of Stirling Castle Rock. During the summer wanderings of some of her company in Fife, she was attracted to a tent-preaching at a communion, and heard: 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things written in the book of the law to do them.' She thought she had continued in *nothing*, came under deep conviction, and, returning to Stirling, found the truth that met her need, chiefly in Erskine Church, and under the teaching of Mr. Campbell. She became thenceforward 'a light shining in a dark place,' and for many years she lived quietly and consistently, supporting an aged mother by her industry. She was afterwards herself

almost entirely bedridden for about eighteen years, and dependent on charity.

Of her Mr. Robertson says:—

‘She spoke of God as one who lived in His presence, and of Christ as one dwelling near His cross. Hence it was that, in a wide circle of Christian friends, her name became a sort of inspiring watchword for the cultivation of Christian graces and heavenly affections. Often on Sabbath between services there might be seen directing their steps to Jeanie’s garret, on the Castle Hill, students who were preparing for the ministry of the gospel. She was a stranger to the names of their classical poets and orators, but they felt that she was well fitted to instruct them in everything truly spiritual, being so richly familiar with the strains of the “Sweet Singer of Israel,” and with the nobler eloquence of Him who “spake as never man spake.” They went to that favourite spot to learn their practical theology, to study “the faith and patience of the saints;” and often might they have been heard saying to each other as they returned: “Did not our hearts burn within us?”

‘She cautioned them frequently against the danger of putting active zeal in the room of heart Christianity—of confounding frequent thinking or speaking of the things of God officially with the graces of His Spirit in the soul. She reminded them that “a servant cannot live on the act of preparing food for others, but she must have her own meals besides.” She urged them to live much in the spirit of dependence and of prayer, and never to forget that word of Jesus, “Abide in Me.” “Be sure,” said she, “that you commend Christ weel wherever you go. You’ll never be

able to tell sinners half o' His worth. For He is just a *Non-such*. There's nae spot in Him."

'At another time, when speaking of "the winning of souls as being the grand thing we want, and ministers who will really *seek* to win them," she added, "But mind, ye maun gang warily aboot it, for perishing souls are just like a man lyin' on the brow o' a rock sleepin', wi' the sea below him. Eh, how canny you would deal wi' a man like this! You wouldna gie a wild shout, in case you waukened him in a start, and he lost his balance. Wouldn't you try to draw him aff to a place o' safety wi' great tenderness and affection? 'He that winneth souls is wise.'"

On Mr. Robertson's visiting her once, with a brother, after nearly three years' absence, she said to him: 'That health God has restored is a gift which it is at your peril to put to an improper use.' Visiting her again with three other young men, she asked regarding them, 'But can you say they are the friends of the truth?' and made these among other remarks: 'Oh, what safety in Christ's hold of me! what comfort in my hold of Him!' 'The Law-giver is the Law-fulfiller. I cannot tell you the joy I have in His unchanging love. He can never cast away any of the jewels of the cabinet that He koft sae dear.' 'Carry a savour of Christ continually about with you.'

To Luther's 'trio that makes a minister—prayer, meditation, and temptation'—it was with a calm persuasion that Mr. Robertson added—

'... the visitation of the too-much-unvisited cottage and garret of the afflicted saint, whom, though poor in this

world, “God has chosen rich in faith.” It was ‘there in conference that he heard (what he thought) the best lectures on Divinity, and felt with overwhelming force the grace of the Saviour, and the nearness of eternity. Such sick and dying rooms are the best schools for the living and the healthy to get spiritual instruction ; and oh ! how little do the crowds that pass and repass, and gaze unmeaningly on everything that offers itself—how little do they know of the interest, from more worlds than one, that meets and clusters round that little chamber ! If blessings are bestowed and judgments averted in answer to prayer, if the Bible teaches that the efficacy of prayer is proportioned to the inwrought fervour, it is impossible to say how much this neighbourhood is indebted to those saintly persons, who employ on our behalf so powerful intercession with God.’

‘Blessed gospel, which can so soften the pillow of the suffering followers of Jesus !’ ‘What a Bethel is the bed of poverty, or the chamber of sickness, when a person, simple as simplicity itself, discovers such gifts and powers as seem to come immediately from above. Reserved and retiring on other subjects, and at other times, they seem to have their lips touched, and their tongues unloosed on this. They express themselves in such a manner, that one is never tired of hearing them ; yea, the most modest and timid can come forward and confess Christ with such a holy boldness as reminds you of her who said, “I cannot plead for Christ, but I can die for Him.” How delightful and salutary the fragrance of these blossoms of paradise. To meet unexpectedly, as it were by the waters of Babylon, even one citizen of Zion . . . is sufficient to make “the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.” None but those who have felt it

can know what it is for them to acknowledge one another, and to taste the blessedness of communion in the love of Christ. They bear the unerring features of the household of faith.'

A little later he says: 'Drawing near God, and receiving inspiration from His Word, though destitute, like the first disciples, of "staff and scrip," let every Christian labour among his family, his kindred, his neighbourhood—among the young who need him, the sick who desire him, and the poor who will welcome him. His Master will find him field enough for usefulness; and though the world shall deride him, and cast him forth from its fortunate places, he need not feed on the smile of its favour, but on the stern resolves and heavenward enjoyments of an apostle's toilsome calling. One such Christian were worth a hundred, and a hundred such were worth a host, to revive and quicken the pining interests of Jehovah's Zion.'

‘Visit the poor, the outcast, the perishing, my fellow-Christian, and you will find them worthy to be visited. Take an interest in their condition, and you will not only confer, but inherit a blessing. ’Tis the finest office of “religion, pure and undefiled, to visit the fatherless in their affliction,” and those who have no helper. Most like it is to the providence of the Father of Mercies—so tender, so noiseless, and so unseen—so effectual. Most like it is to prayer, this private communion of two afflicted ones—the one in want, which the other can supply.

‘It needs no society, no committee, no subscription list, no memorial of any kind. The witness is in heaven, the record is on high. . . . The vilest sinner and the bitterest enemy are not to be excluded from the sphere of your

tenderness. . . . If there is real love in the heart, in those visits, one may say *anything*.'

Again, elsewhere: 'Nothing but an affectionate forth-going is necessary on our part among the outcast and long-neglected families of our population, that we may have a willing and warm reception on theirs. It is utterly a mistake (to think) that among the labouring classes there is a hardy, an insolent defiance, which no assiduities of goodwill, or of kindness, on the part of Christian visitors, can possibly overcome. They have been tried in this respect, and found courteous and inviting. It is not in human nature to withstand the charm which lies in unwearied zeal for their best interests.'

As the summer of 1836 advanced, Mr. Robertson's prospects of attendance at the Hall did not brighten; but whether they did or not, he still cherished the thought of being bound as it were by office to religion, as a wholesome antidote to the dangers of temptations to relapse into utter worldliness and apostasy; trusting to get, through grace, the antipathy in his heart to what is good destroyed by close attention to such duties and exercises. His uncertainty kept him in sympathy with the good man who said, 'I have not had a to-morrow for years.'

In the spring of 1837, a young man, of the name of Miller, was imprisoned in Stirling, on a charge of murder. One who was a boy at the time still recalls the feeling of reverential awe with which he used to watch the delicate young student gain admis-

sion to the gaol, in order to deal with the culprit, when under sentence of death. Mr. Robertson refers to the exhaustion consequent on visits to poor Miller's cell, in which, no doubt, his sympathy with a brother-man standing in such a solemn position was almost too much for his bodily frame. After Miller's death, the Falkirk Tract Society asked him to draw up a statement of the whole case for publication. This he did, intermingling the narrative with practical lessons throughout, in which he aimed at leading his readers to feel, as he himself did: 'There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God.'

The man went by the nickname of 'Scatters.' Some time after Scatters' death, Mr. Robertson met the culprit's mother on the road to Larbert. She was on the way to her work in the wood—peeling bark. She threw down her pipe as soon as her eye caught his, came forward weeping, and said how very glad she was to meet him, as she did not know where he was to be found. After giving a history of the progress of poor Sandy's degeneracy, she added: 'But it was all ordained so to be, and I'm quite content!!!'

When expostulated with on her intemperate habits, she said she had tasted no whisky for six months past, and if anybody should abhor it, she added, 'it should surely be me, for it has cost me my laddie. I canna get his end oot o' my mind an hoor in the day. I'm aye thinkin' o' him.'

After the Hall season of 1837, Mr. Robertson went

to reside as tutor in a family in the neighbourhood of Falkirk, during the long recess between the annual periods of study in Edinburgh—his health being now better, though he still felt the ‘thorn in the flesh.’ It was in no hireling spirit that he entered on his charge, but with the one desire uppermost, the promotion of the welfare of all, and specially, that the ‘dear little ones committed to’ his care might become wise unto salvation. He seems to have been able to continue with them till the summer of the following year.

Among his occasional labours in his new sphere, stimulating addresses on home and foreign missions occupied a prominent and interesting place. We find him also assisting at the formation of an ‘association for religious purposes,’ and again at the formation of ‘the Falkirk Branch of the British and Foreign Young Men’s Society.’ Speaking of the latter, he described its purpose as being ‘to pour the gifts and graces of each into a common treasury for the benefit of all; to increase their watchful interest in one another, and thereby multiply their guards against self-deception and temptation; to mark their respective qualifications for the labours of Christian love, and with faithful affection to rouse to their suitable improvement; and to quicken each other’s zeal on behalf of those who are perishing *without* knowledge, or, what is worse, perishing *with it*.’ He was, in fact, urging the young men to those exercises and com-

passionate labours which he had himself found to be such means of grace.

In these wise words we see a foreshadowing also of his own later work, while we recall the keen and loving eye with which he watched over the flocks of which the Holy Ghost made him overseer, the pains he took to find out the qualifications of each, the faithful affection with which he sought to assign to *every* man his work, setting himself, with all the loving, discerning influence he could bring to bear, against *useless* Church-membership either in man or woman.

Thus he speaks at this time in an address on Home Missions :—

‘One feature of the Christian instruction plan which commends itself strongly to my mind is this, that it does away with the mode of discharging that part of the ministerial function which is greatly calculated to dilute and enfeeble its effort—the mode, I mean, of merely making an ordinary call from house to house, and afterwards delivering the exhortation and uttering the petitions of the service in a little congregation collected from them all. Men have a fatal facility, we must be all aware, of escaping the part of admonition addressed to them in company with others. They hear for these others more than for themselves—seated, as it were, in the centre of the crowd, where the arrow can reach them only through another’s side ; and so, what is suitable to many is often effective with none. What is addressed to all is powerless with each.

‘The preacher, who wishes to do good, will labour above all to insulate his hearers—to place each of them apart, and render it impossible for him to escape in the crowd. This is precisely the character of that domiciliary visitation of which we speak. Its intention is to render escape impossible. It checks that subtle delusion which would blunt and turn aside the edge of that quick and powerful sword which, in itself, is “sharper than a two-edged sword, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”’

Mr. Robertson did not, in his ministry, avoid such district gatherings as he refers to, after a day’s visitation; but ‘the Sword of the Spirit’ would, no doubt, be used in his previous visitation with his accustomed skill, so that when the evening came, the hearers were ready to apply the truth to themselves.

From these student days and onwards he sought to be on his ‘guard against indiscriminate and desultory reading as an awful consumer of time;’ and he made it a point to have always by him some *profitable* book—be it select biography, practical theology, or any other such to which he might recur, to refresh his spirit and get renewed zest for pure, evangelical truth. And, along with all earnest theological investigation, he was satisfied of the necessity of mingling deep devotional exercise; for, in this frame, the mind will feel the suitableness, and authority, and worth of many truths which, in a state of levity and speculative dissipation, would not make the same impression.

It was in the same prayerful spirit that he attended the lectures of his professors, mixed with his fellow-students, and waited on the ministrations of the sanctuary.

In another connection he says at this time: ‘If our reading be confined to subjects which we cannot closely, and continually, and practically apply, what it will foster is not the “charity that edifieth,” but “the knowledge that puffeth up”—a rock’ which he sought to ‘learn effectually to shun.’

## CHAPTER VI.

### Preacher and Evangelist.

1839-1840.

MR. ROBERTSON's last session at the Hall was in 1838, and the Presbytery of Stirling and Falkirk licensed him to preach the gospel on the 30th of July 1839. He went forth to his work under a crushing sense of his unfitness and unreadiness for the 'stupendous service' he had taken in hand; not in the fulness of strength, but in feebleness; trembling at the words, 'Not a novice, etc.,'—fearful lest he should run before being called; and yet assuring himself that '*His* grace would be sufficient for whomsoever *He* sends into the work.'

A friend tells us that when he was licensed, and often before, it had been regarded by many as unlikely that he would ever be able to preach; and yet remarks that, 'in some marvellous way, as soon as he was licensed he began to preach and to work in a way few strong men could have done.'

Writing at this time of himself, he says: 'Unlooked-for mercy meets me at every turn. The more we try

to do for our Master the kinder He shows Himself. . . . It would be a thing of hopeless drudgery without the Spirit's help, but with it a thing of heartfelt joy.'

During this period he was not only preaching, according to appointment, in various places on Sabbaths, but addressing week-day meetings on different subjects, including tract distribution, town missions, temperance ; directing his attention frequently in this way to the young, teaching them, among other things, their duty and privilege in regard to the spread of the gospel ; and specially throwing himself into revival and evangelistic work wherever he had an opportunity.

About this time, the Rev. Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, in asking his services as 'a great gratification to his congregation and to himself,' says : 'I trust your health is not suffering from your professional engagements. It is not generally necessary to say to either young or old preachers, "Spare thyself;" but this is an injunction which I apprehend the Master is now laying on you. Husband your physical energies ; moderate exertion will invigorate them, over-exertion may destroy them.'

We find in Mr. Robertson's diary some notes entitled, 'Gleanings in Conversation with Beggars,' which contain much that is interesting and not a little that is quaint. From them we learn how some of his time was spent during the short periods of residence at home, before he entered fully on his official duties—

as well as on subsequent visits—and also a few of the many mistaken ideas among the poor and ignorant about God and salvation. From his room at Greenhill where he studied he could see the beggars approach the back door. Before they could be served, he was round in the avenue at the end of the house waiting for them. A younger member of the family was puzzled as to why he was always talking to them, but occasionally catching some words of the conversation, found that he was doing earnest work for eternity. It is not necessary for those who knew him to say that it was no official religiousness he put on ; but the ‘well of water in him’ was ‘springing up,’ unrestrained, ‘unto eternal life,’ in office or out of it.

Repeatedly he visited Kilsyth, taking part in the interesting scenes there in 1839 in connection with the ministry of the Rev. W. H. Burns, D.D. To other places he sought to be the means of carrying similar blessing, with all the hopefulness of one who shunned to ‘set limits to the Holy One of Israel.’

He carefully studied the movement at Kilsyth, rejoicing in all that seemed wholesome ; and, while throwing himself in a sympathetic manner alongside of it, he was learning to discern for himself and others between the true and the false.

Well persuaded that such general rousings of the human spirit from lethargy have their reason and root in the momentous *Facts* of our being and prospects—considering them most reasonable and desirable, he

was ever anxious to guide and keep them in such channels as were in accordance with wisdom and Scripture. No one shrank more from extravagances of every sort, or was more concerned to keep the balance of truth.

On one visit to a revival scene he says:—

‘There could be less morbid excitation, but more fervent affection; less bustle, but more work; less feverish agitation, more wholesome fervour.

‘It cannot be denied—we have no wish to conceal—that there are excesses and extravagances. Like spots on the sun’s disc, they appear more conspicuous from the pure and holy scenes with which they are connected.

‘Have they invented any new scheme, or any novel application of the old scheme for converting sinners? No. The instruments and weapons employed are those that have been always found “mighty to the pulling down of strongholds.” Among these prayer has held a prominent place. The wisdom of God makes use of the all-pervading power of sympathy. The ardour reaches from bosom to bosom. Every man’s countenance, every fixed eye will preach—will utter a mysterious language, that will awaken the sensibilities of the most careless. . . .’

Some years before, he wrote: ‘Infinitely rather give me the turbulent excesses of vitality, than the long, quiet, sealing, fearful slumber of the lethargic soul.’

The *Monthly Visitor* of the Scottish Monthly Tract Society for July of this year, on ‘The Throne of Grace or Ejaculatory Prayer,’ was, we understand, from his pen.

About this time we find him engaged also in several courses of special meetings, in Dunfermline, Alloa, Bathgate, etc. etc. In arranging for one of these in Alloa, in January 1840, he adds:—

‘There is a tone of healthful spirituality needed for an effort like that which you contemplate, and a responsibility attaching to it, the thought of which makes me shrink; but “the God of heaven He will prosper us, therefore we His servants will arise and build.” Too long have we slept over the interests of Zion. The triumphing of the wicked is fearful. Scarcely less so the supineness of Zion’s children. “It is time to seek the Lord till He come and *rain* righteousness.”’

He alludes to similar work in Dunfermline, in the following letter to the same friend:—

‘Musselburgh, Feb. 14, 1840.

‘My very dear Brother,— I long to hear how matters have gone at Dunfermline. Want of knowledge may leave *our* harps dumb, or want of certainty of knowledge may give jarring notes and wailing tones, intermingled with our song of salvation; but surely the word has “run swiftly” and been “glorified.” Surely angels have been rejoicing over fresh conquests to the sceptre of Immanuel. Doubtless the small *apparent* success of some of our efforts is just owing to our unwillingness to cast ourselves entirely on the Lord. We are everlasting grappling at His honour. There has been a looking to the supposed disparity of our means to our ends, rather than to His uplifted arm, and according to our unbelief so has it been to us.

‘I was much struck and quickened on that very delightful Thursday at Bo’ness by the text for the day previous in the *Christian Almanack*, “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God”—in the passage is added (Deut. vi.)—“as ye tempted Him in Massah.” And that tempting was their chiding for water—the indulgence of the dishonouring suspicion, “Is the Lord among us or not?” and their impious demand for a proof of His presence. But oh, the superaboundings of His grace over the abounding of their sin—and ours !

‘“Behold He smote the rock, and forth  
Came streams of waters great.”

‘The exercises of last week did send me back to my post with greater fervour of trust in Christ’s grace and compassion for the perishing. I do feel as in a dry and thirsty land here, “where no water is,” and few, few are disposed to speak to the rock, that it may give forth its streams. I am “sowing among thorns”—“prophesying to dry bones.” . . . “Come from the four winds, O breath!”’

The ‘post’ to which he refers in the letter quoted was in Musselburgh. He was requested to go thither early in 1840, by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, to try and revive a cause that had been ‘wasted and wellnigh wrecked, by some painful incidents which had occurred in connection with recent efforts made by the congregation to obtain a successor to the Rev. Mr. Hill, as colleague to their venerable senior pastor, Mr. Black.’

A few sentences from a letter to a friend may indicate the state of the congregation, as it touched his peaceable nature, and also the kind of work to which he had to set himself :—

‘The spirits of the belligerent party are surging “like the troubled sea.” In such an element He cannot dwell whose emblem is the *Dove*. The hosts of the worldly, glad of any pretext for repudiating Christianity, are passing by, wagging their heads, and saying, “Behold how these Christians *hate* one another!” Truly, my dear friend, the deepest, deadliest wounds that can be given are received when Christ is “wounded in the house of His friends.” The Sabbath attendance has about doubled these two days. It used to vary from thirty to eighty. The Sabbath-school classes which I have commenced present a field of great promise. I have a most interesting group of more advanced young persons on the Monday, and a weekly meeting for revival purposes on the Friday evenings. Cease not, beloved brother, to supplicate grace to help me in this time of need.

“Hundreds are asleep, or dreaming that they are on the Lord’s side, while they care not for “the fatherless in their affliction,” and are all over “spotted with the world.” . . . The vile laugh at the shaking of our spear, if the Captain of the Lord’s host be not with us. I feel wholly *shut up* to help from on high! Blessed necessity! Oh to be as polished shafts in *His* quiver, and sharp in the hearts of His enemies!

‘I expect much from a negotiation, which I entered into yesterday, with good Mr. — and Mr. —, in regard to co-operation in a Sabbath evening meeting, in each other’s churches. It was with a view of preparing the way for a week-day evening *series*, and if I get this plan carried into effect, I know I may depend on your kind aid, should you find it at all possible. . . . Oh, let us be fellow-intercessors and fellow-helpers on the way to our Father’s house.

“‘Glorious things are spoken of thee, Zion, city of God.’ . . .’

Some weeks later he writes to the same:—

‘I long to see you that we may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all His wondrous works. He is making waters to break forth in this wilderness, and streams in this desert. I have daily visits from inquirers. There is real heart-work going on. . . .’

And referring to a second series of meetings about to be held in Alloa, he says:—

‘Oh that He may rend the heavens, and come down to the rescue of Mansoul. . . . Let us ask and expect largely. “Intimate the morning meetings?” Surely. They are the true *meter* of the interest. All our success here is to be traced to *prayer*!

‘As to preaching on the Sabbath evening, I need not say how glad I would be to try it, if I did not apprehend danger. During the past ten days I have preached seven times, and addressed six, so that my strength is well worn. I might disable myself for the work of the week by a Sabbath of excessive effort. Could you not get some other to take half of the day? I *dare not* engage on any other terms. Alas for this “vile body”! How it encumbers and weighs us down. Oh that we had a thousand hearts and a thousand tongues to magnify the name that is “above every name.”

“‘His worth, if all the nations knew,  
Sure the whole world would love Him too.’”

Besides the general work of these meetings in Alloa, ‘he went and hunted out people’ in the poorer

districts, and, it is understood, held little meetings there, engaged the young to visit the sick, etc.

One says of this time:—‘He had certainly a most extraordinary hold over people’s minds. I have tried to analyse it, but I cannot. I know that when I had not seen him for years, he would only have had to say to me I should do a thing, and I would have done it, never looking at difficulties.’

Soon after these meetings, one congregation in Alloa in connection with which they were held (the First United Secession) had occasion to consider the propriety of engaging a missionary to labour in the neglected districts, and to act as a partial assistant to their own minister, the Rev. P. McDowall, who was then in broken health. A congregational meeting was called to consider the question, when a new and unexpected thought was found to have taken possession of the people; and it was resolved by them to take the necessary steps to invite Mr. Robertson to be colleague and successor to their pastor, and to assist in missionary work as well. After these wishes began to be first mooted, Mr. Robertson carefully sought to avoid putting himself in the way of the people, and regarded the whole affair as having much in it of the stuff that dreams are made of. But the hearts of the people seemed set on him.

The call had some attractions, and when there was nothing indistinct or dubious in ‘the vision,’ it appeared imperative on him to ponder it, with all the calm-

ness he was able to command—a calmness that was weighted with his ‘apprehensive and overwhelming consciousness of inadequacy to such a work.’

After six months’ labour at Musselburgh as a probationer, the congregation there also called him to be its pastor. ‘The news of Musselburgh did not surprise me’ (it was said to him). ‘The people there would neither have been *grateful enough*, nor *selfish enough* if they had not called you.’ Other competing calls came, at the same time, from Dunfermline and Partick.

In the midst of the consideration of these calls, his spiritual work, in various places, was rejoicing his heart, and he was gathering fruit which continues to this day.

He writes to Mr. McDowall (to whom several of the foregoing and following letters are addressed):—

‘. . . Circumstances have set me a-thinking, this week, of a sermon on “fighting the good fight of faith.” I feel a firm faith that the cause of genuine revival among you will, in the long run, be promoted by all such innocuous attempts of Satan to impede it. Oh for firmer faith in Divine direction, amid the present perplexed intertwinements of my path! I do wish to give myself up to the guidance of that Pole Star, and to follow *whithersoever* it leads. When almost sinking “at His feet as dead” with anxiety, I am often rallied by recollecting how He laid His right hand, with solemn grandeur and gentleness, on John, saying, “Fear not, I am the Living One.”

‘He “has the key of death,” and so long as He has work

for either of us to do, He will neither turn the key, nor suffer man or devil to injure a hair of our head. Oh to learn more confiding love, where John learned it, on the bosom of the Master!'

'I have had visits this week from the commissioners of the different congregations. . . I wish to put a blank *for everything* into that Hand which was nailed to the cross for me.

'Never was preaching such sweet work as it is now-a-days surely! I think I have seen results that it were worth while to have come into being for, worth living for, worth dying for, a thousand times over!'

In some of the evangelistic work to which reference has been made, Mr. James Morison, a fellow-student (afterwards minister at Kilmarnock, and now Principal of the Evangelical Union Church, Glasgow), was a fellow-labourer. Together they visited many places in the middle and north of Scotland. In the north as well as elsewhere, their united work is still remembered as fruitful of good. It is said that in their meetings Mr. Morison usually took the first part, addressing himself to the conscience with the object of arousing and alarming; while it fell to Mr. Robertson afterwards to set forth free grace—'the blessings of goodness' which anticipate and are prepared for the cry of need.

The die was cast in regard to Alloa, and he wrote to the clerk of Presbytery:—

'I beg to make known through you to the Presbytery. . . .

that, after mature deliberation, I find it my duty to decline the call addressed to me by the first congregation of Alloa. My feelings towards that congregation I shall probably have other opportunities of expressing to themselves. The pain I feel at thus disappointing their wishes is greatly alleviated by the fact that they are already so highly favoured with an efficient pastorship.'

Meantime he writes to their pastor:—

‘. . . . I was detained (blessed detention) at Bridge of Teith, till late last night, by inquirers. They came *sua sponte*. God was among us of a truth. I have been preparing something for the afternoon on “the waters” from “the well of life.” . . .

‘The accompanying letter has fallen in my way to-night, and I have requested the loan of it from —. I send it to you to “comfort you concerning the work and labour of your hands.” . . . How much more of the seed which you have watched, and wept, and prayed over, may be germinating beneath the soil! . . .

‘I feel every day more deeply the solemn necessity of simple views of the gospel, and of vigilant solicitude that they be exhibited just as they stand in the record of mercy, without adulteration, addition, or change. It is no light matter to handle eternal truth, connected as it is—every word of it—with the honour of Jesus. . . .’

During the years 1834 and 1835, Mr. Robertson seems to have read and thought not a little on the nature and extent of the Atonement, and questions akin to these; and we find notes expressing in un-

mistakeable terms the conclusions to which he was led. Thus he saw his way, even at this early period, to that unfettered offer of the blessings of salvation which is now happily characteristic of evangelical preaching in Scotland, but which, at that time, some did not feel warranted to make, through fear of not giving due prominence to Divine Sovereignty in the work of redemption. Whilst he held unhesitatingly the great truth on the Divine side of the question, his conclusion on the human side is found expressed in such words as these: ‘Christ died for me and for every man in such a sense as warrants me and every man to regard the offer of pardon as made to us without distinction,’ and more in the same strain.

## CHAPTER VII.

### Ministry in Musselburgh.

1840-1847.

OF the four calls, ‘he bravely chose that which, to the common view, seemed the least desirable, where the work would be the heaviest, the battle the hardest,’ and the temporal advantages to be reaped the lowest.

The ordination took place at Musselburgh on Tuesday the 27th of October 1840.

‘It was then,’ writes the Rev. Dr. Joseph Brown, at that time in Dalkeith, ‘that my acquaintance with Mr. Robertson began. The intercourse of neighbour ministers shortly ripened into friendship, and that friendship led to frequent fellowship, in the course of which we never knew the joy of reconciliation, for we had never known alienation or estrangement.

‘I remember well with what energy and zeal he set himself to build up the walls that had been broken down, and to repair the desolations that had been wrought, and with what success his efforts were crowned. He succeeded in infusing something of his own spirit into those whom his ministry drew around him ; and, by God’s blessing on His own work, and the efforts of those who had a mind to work along with

him, the congregation grew in numbers and influence, and attained a condition of comparative prosperity.'

A week after his ordination he wrote:—

' . . . I have made shift to occupy once more my little sentry-box here. It was a melting day to me. The idea came over me several times, so as almost to unman me, that if the trumpet be not seasonably blown, the ruin of souls—the victims of my unfaithfulness—may be found charged to my account in the book of God's remembrance! Oh pray hard, my dear —. . . . I need wisdom, much "meekness of wisdom." . . . '

And a little later:—

' My tale of work here is growing very heavy, but the Lord is very gracious, and raises up friends on all sides. The "well of life" is springing up hopefully in some hearts. . . . I know you bear me on your heart. In Him who bears us both on His, I am, yours ever lovingly, J. R.'

' . . . Since the loss of the fishermen I have been preaching to that class every week. The Lord is setting before me "an open door." I am not anxious about the future. My business is with present duty. Usefulness, usefulness! that is the point. The congregation is daily increasing. . . . 'Tis like a little heaven—to go to heaven in—when we get low at His feet, and feast (while feeding others) on "Love Divine, all love excelling,"'

Mrs. Lyall, of Adelaide, South Australia (wife of the Rev. James Lyall), who has long occupied a position of much usefulness there, thus records in 1883 her impression of those early days:—

‘ My early recollections go as far back as forty-three years. I was at his ordination in the little church of Bridge Street, Musselburgh. All the others of our family who were present that day have joined the family above. Mr. Robertson had other calls, if I mistake not, and chose Musselburgh because it was in a depressed state at that time.

‘ Our parents joined his church at his ordination, because of his winning power with children. I used to hear he had only twelve families on whom he could count ; but he soon gathered round him a larger and warmly attached congregation. Some, like ourselves, walked several miles to church, coming from Edinburgh, Portobello, etc.

‘ Mr. Robertson’s aim was to make the congregation like a large, loving, busy family. The new members then were always publicly received in the church, as is common now, and he contended that no worldly introduction was needed after that ; and the old members were expected to fraternize forthwith with the new ones.

‘ The Sabbath services had such a charm for us children that to be obliged to remain at home was no small trial. A rainy day (and it *can* rain in dear old Scotland) was never imagined to be a hindrance. We simply dressed accordingly.

‘ The interval between morning and afternoon service was spent in the session-room, and it was often made radiant to us little ones by Mr. Robertson’s looking in to speak to my father (who was one of his elders), while with his *two* hands he was going over all of us, giving each a benign look, and a hearty shake of the hand. How we did love him ! and so heavenly did he seem to us, that my sister, whom he baptized in 1841, remarked, when quite a little

girl, that “our Saviour,” she supposed, “would be just like Mr. Robertson.”

‘He was often troubled then with a constitutional affection of the heart, and his impression was that his life would be a short one, and certainly he made the most of it.

‘The Sabbath school met from four till five, and even after his two sermons, when he must have been quite exhausted, he generally gave us a few words at the close, and, whatever else was forgotten, they were not.

‘In his ordinary discourses he always dropped some crumbs for the children, which kept us on the outlook. Then there were periodical sermons to the young, in the afternoon, when there was a specially large attendance; for the parents, as used to be remarked, liked “the bairns’ meat.” It is needless to add that the love of the Divine Redeemer to the young was his favourite theme on these occasions.

‘Mr. Robertson educated his young people thoroughly in their duty to missions, home and foreign. He had a fine band of active and attached young men.

‘I remember one benighted village at which a service was held by two or three young men on their way home from church.

‘And as regards foreign missions, it cheered his heart when one of our family<sup>1</sup> (long since gone to rest) went, years after, to labour in the West Indies; and still later, another —she whom he baptized—went as a missionary’s wife to the New Hebrides;<sup>2</sup> her missionary zeal being kindled from her

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Wm. Whitecross, Grand Cayman.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Paton, of Tanna.

earliest days by such verses as: “Would you wish to be told the best use of a penny?” etc.

‘Mr. Robertson also established a mothers’ meeting, the influence of which was very helpful and blessed to anxious mothers. I used to hear often of this agency, my mother being secretary.

‘He did not spare himself from outside work either. When he came to visit us, he would hold a service in a schoolroom in the town in which we lived; and as it was too far for him to return that evening, unless he drove, he remained all night with us. These were as angels’ visits! The first one I specially remember. The hours after the service sped so rapidly, first in drawing from us what we recollect of the sermon, and bright, loving talk, then in listening to his converse with our parents, that twelve o’clock had arrived before we were aware, and we children *had* to say “Good-night”—going reluctantly away, feeling it was all too short, in such loved society. At family worship he asked that we children might so live that others might take knowledge of us that we had been with Jesus.

‘During those years we were often sent messages by my father to Mr. Robertson, but I never recollect his missing an opportunity of speaking to me about the Saviour, and pressing home His claims upon my love and service. It was done in no formal way, but out of the very abundance of a heart full of love to Christ, and yearning for souls; and though the young heart was too timid to respond, the impression was made, never perhaps to be effaced.

‘In the year 1843, when the thrill of sorrow ran through the churches at the early death of the sainted M’Cheyne, he made full use of it, and seemed doubly earnest to work while

it was day, inspiring others with his own divinely-received fervour.

‘In 1846 we passed from his ministry to that of Mr. M'Dowall, and he kindly asked two of us to write regularly to him. My business was to give an account of the sermons we heard ; thus he *kept* hold of us, while yet we had made no open profession of being Christ's.

‘Various other incidents come into my mind, but it is difficult to write without being personal.

‘About my childhood's most beloved minister, I have had two thoughts more or less life-long. One is, that the theme of the successful preacher must be “Jesus Christ and Him crucified ;” the other is, the enduring influence of a pastor who can reach the hearts of little children.

‘Of course Mr. Robertson was *naturally* very attractive to young people ; but if young ministers, not so gifted, would take special care to cultivate the winning grace that draws the children, for their Master's sake, they would be much more influential in leading them to Him. Mr. Robertson's words to us about the Lord Jesus were so genuine, so bright, and so loving, that we could never think them wearisome or commonplace ; and, all through life, to think of *him* has been to remember his Master.’

Another writes :—

‘. . . I had no close intercourse with him, though I knew him very well, and loved him.

‘When I was young, I used to go to hear him at Musselburgh, and would have then walked ten miles, and sat hours, to hear him preach. There was something wonderfully attractive about his youthful ministry—great natural power and

eloquence, a melting, winning manner, and also very clear and powerful expositions of the truth. So it all appeared to me then. What I would think now I know not; I have no reason to think I would think differently. He seemed, up to the last of my personal knowledge of him, to be always the same loving, gentle-spirited man, averse to sectarian bigotries, and willing to “forgather” with all who loved the Lord.’

From Musselburgh, Mr. Robertson writes:—

‘ October 11, 1841.

‘ We have had a prayer-encompassed week. The Lord has been uniting our hearts to call upon His name. Nearly all parties here have been co-operating—praying, etc., in each other’s churches. . . . The Master is manifesting compassion and favour to me in my work here, beyond all expectation great. The joy is ours, the glory His !’

In asking ministerial assistance at an evening social meeting, he says:—‘ The general plan . . . is to insist upon all the different ways in which a truly Christian people, in all their different spheres of life, may aid their minister, in the promotion of the work of God. Your friend —— takes the general topic, —— speaks to elders, you to mothers, if possible, etc.’

On another similar occasion:—‘ I announce as your text for the anniversary meeting: “The church ought to be liberal.” Don’t spare the churls.’

‘ I have had a weary, weeping seed-time here, but the harvest is begun. . . . Street preaching on the Sabbath evenings I have found to be a remarkable auxiliary, in

connection with our congregational Christian Instruction Society. The establishment of this species of agency is quite a novelty in this burgh. I am persuaded that the instrumentality of such "helpers" in our churches admits of much addition and vast improvement.

"There is another plan which I have found singularly successful. The folks pour in questions (anonymously) on Bible subjects; to the public answering of which I have had to devote an additional evening every week. Not one (among many scores which have been already taken up) has been a question of curiosity or of speculation. They come out in unwonted numbers to all the week-evening meetings, and yesterday afternoon the church was nearly as full as it was when you preached among us "the unsearchable riches of Christ." My strength is carried to its full stretch, but oh, how delightful the exercise of faith in going to the Strong for more !

"I do fear that "the clouds" of Synod-time may "return after the rain" yet. We were indeed "led in a way that we knew not," and found ourselves "like them that dreamed," believing not for joy and wondering. But it is much too soon yet

"— to speak of it and smile,  
Like mariners, who, on the peaceful shore,  
Sit, and with pleasure talk of dangers o'er."

"Must we not "rejoice with trembling" ?"

" November 17, 1841.

" . . . Yours has found me a bit of an invalid, *i.e. convalescent*; but, since this day week, I have been passing through a pretty sharp storm of tribulation. There is no

denying that extra work, with exposure to cold, brought it on. . . . The doctor tells me I must spend *another silent Sabbath*, else I will be unfitted for going to you. Rather than that *this* should be the consequence, I will not “peep, or mutter, or move the wing.” . . . I wish, by all means, to say *Yes* to you and your children. [This was in response to a request that he would address the Sabbath-school children at their annual meeting.] . . . Have I anything to do on Sabbath but the evening sermon and table address? No *fencings*,<sup>1</sup> I hope? Please relieve me from *them*. . . . If you intend throwing off a hymn for each of the children, I could send you a nice new one on missions. . . .

In reply to the remark, ‘So you have been putting a rod into your Father’s hand, and He has been using it. The Lord bless the smiting, etc.,’—he says: ‘Like dew upon the parched spirit, yours, so tender, so soothing, came in just now, and found me “sitting alone and keeping *silence*, because of this *rod*.” I feel as if all the world had gone wrong—“all the foundations out of course,” when Sabbath “returns, but not to me returns” liberty to plead for God. Our Father knows what will be a trial to us. I have not *vis* to preach to-morrow, however eager. . . .

‘Please do exempt me from these *fencings*, and the rest may all stand. The Monday evening will suit nicely for the nursing of the lambs. I shall rejoice to lend a hand.

‘Let us make a point of special prayer for special visitations

<sup>1</sup> The word ‘fencing’ refers to the custom, common in former days in Scotland, of ‘fencing the tables,’ *i.e.* indicating classes of persons who had no right to partake of the Communion. This was usually done on the Communion day itself, and in that respect was uncongenial to Mr. Robertson’s mind; he considered it should be done at an earlier stage.

of heavenly influence at your solemn feast,—“as in the *days of old*.”

“As we have seen Him heretofore  
Within that holy place.”

‘Hasten on, happy eternity, when we shall see His face, without a veil between. “Our light affliction.” . . . My love to the little ones. God Himself be their Father, the Guide of their youth, their unfailing Friend.’

In July 1842, Mr. Robertson was under call to the pastorate of the congregation worshipping in Lothian Road Church, Edinburgh. The call had been signed by 879 members and adherents. Notwithstanding the recognition of this as a specially encouraging post of labour, and of much in it that ministered to the gratification of earthly motives, there was still the unbiassed wish to listen honestly to the responding Spirit, and to pursue faithfully the path of *known* duty, whithersoever it led. It ended, as usual with him, on what seemed from most points of view the self-sacrificing side. The call was refused, and Mr. Robertson remained in Musselburgh six years longer.

Writing about a year and half later, he says (in connection with some ministerial engagements) :—

“Man proposeth, but God disposeth.” He leads us round, but He leads us right. . . . I preached yesterday with great comfort. The Lord is “making us glad, according to the days wherein He hath afflicted us.” Oh for a praising heart ! Do you remember the hymn ?

“I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith and love and every grace.”

‘I hope I have been learning to be less solicitous about gilding or ornamenting the “Sword of the Spirit,” and more about trusting to its native power. How much of self one may detect in all his work! and how often we dress up the abomination in the garb of Christian zeal, and then admire it! But it will not do. Self must be in the dust, and Christ exalted.

‘Need we feel surprised, if He every now and then causes a thorn hedge to grow up before us? This He has promised, to keep us from wandering. My beloved friend, when past unprofitableness grieves us, let the supports and revivings we have so frequently received excite our gratitude, and the promises, which “flow clear as crystal from the throne of the Lamb,” refresh us in going forward.

‘We know not which of us shall first cross Jordan—we shall meet on the shores of the Canaan that we love, to weep and sin no more!

‘I trust your dear little girls are not thinking I have forgotten them, or my promise to them. Something that I wished to send them I have not yet succeeded in securing. Will they have a little more patience with me, and accept, in the meanwhile, of all possible love, with these little books, which I have just now found in my desk?

. . . All the sanctifying and consolatory blessings of the covenant be yours, imparted to you all, as you need, all your journey through, till you reach your happy home.’

We find among his papers belonging to this time, one containing the ‘Constitution and Laws of the Musselburgh Association for the *Promotion of Temperance through means of the Church*’—a ‘society of

professing Christian abstainers,' whose 'specific object' was 'enlisting the interest of the friends of the Redeemer in behalf of the Temperance movement.'

Not a few of the early abstainers were so because they were Christians, and carried on their advocacy of the cause on gospel grounds. 'Gospel Temperance' may be a new name, but it is not a new thing. Some years ago, a gentleman remarked to a friend: 'I once heard Mr. Robertson preach a temperance sermon—oh, a long time ago. "They that used curious arts brought their books and burned them," was the text.'

Knowing how the need of every unsaved sinner in every audience he addressed was ever present to Mr. Robertson's mind, the friend asked, 'You would get the gospel before he was done?'

'It was *gospel all through*,' was the reply.

Alluding, in 1834, to a measure proposed then for stemming 'the putrid and stormy stream of pauperism swelled by the tippling customs of the country,' he adds:—

'It is not so much a work of self-denial as the policy of self-defence, by which we evade the fatal necessity of lying entirely at the mercy of events. He—whatever be his station—who withholds his quota of influence from the remedy, may justly consider himself as accessory to the ruin. And if there is a man to be found who is perfectly reconciled to let the fiery flood roll on, his moral structure is such as I shall never envy.'

Referring to an application by a Total Abstinence Society for some service, Mr. Robertson wrote from Musselburgh in 1847 :—

‘ . . . I felt it necessary to refuse the request on account of their mode of managing their social meetings especially. The staple of the entertainment given at such meetings consists of songs and all the frivolities of the ball-room. I was not aware, till very lately, of the extent to which these things had become identified in the public mind with the teetotal cause. I have written remonstrances to them, but I know not yet with what success. We have a society here on the principles of the “Edinburgh Association for the promotion of the cause through means of the Church,” and it is with this I am connected. Let me have the happiness of hearing from you soon on this and other subjects.’

In the summer of 1845, a great sorrow overspread the family at Greenhill. A younger son, George, who had been ordained the previous autumn over the congregation at Busby, was, after a short pastorate of eight months, suddenly removed by death, ‘while yet the dew of youth was upon him,’ to higher service.

The Rev. Dr. Cairns, who knew him well, wrote of him at the time: ‘Rarely has a larger circle of tenderly attached friends been enveloped in so dark a cloud of grief. Few characters have been more simple in their outline, or more harmonious in their proportions, so thoroughly had his whole being grown up under the training of the Spirit, that it was hard

to distinguish in him grace from nature. Any one more ingenuous, tender, and confiding, it is impossible to conceive. His domestic and social affections were vigorous and pure; and selfishness, malignity, and envy seemed utterly unknown to him; while all the features of his character were irradiated by the hallowed light of Christianity, which shone from within as from a lighted candle.'

To James, whose kindred spirit he was, the parting from such a brother was no common sorrow. From their earliest years their love for each other was wonderful. They were of one mind and of one heart —their sympathies met and intertwined, and in nothing more than in 'whatsoever things were pure, and lovely, and of good report.'

But sorrow to James never meant the folding of the hands. Work was always its outcome, and its cure; and from this date a fresh impetus was given to his spiritual life and labours, as the voice came to him with solemnizing power: 'Work while it is day—the night cometh.'

And the Church knows how unceasingly during the thirty-four years that followed he did work until the night came.

As one says, speaking of his early ministry: 'His labours were of no ordinary kind . . . he laboured night and day far beyond his strength, and often we feared he would fill an early grave.'

In October 1845, after ripe acquaintance, Mr. Robertson was married to Eliza, second daughter of Mr. Alexander Baird, Marshill, Alloa, one who was in full sympathy with him in his aims and work. Under her influence he could gladly and freely place any of those whose spiritual welfare he sought, knowing that her conversation would tend to draw them upwards, and confirm his own teaching.

The members of his flock found in her a gentle and sympathizing friend, in quiet association with whom the light of Scripture was thrown on their path, while her habit of quoting choice sayings which she had freshly culled from some author old or new, contributed to the elevation of their intercourse and their mutual quickening.

In writing to a friend, whom he regarded as having, like himself, received his partner from the Lord, he adds, ‘How exactly suited to each other they and we are, mind to mind, and heart to heart! How additionally dear to us the throne of grace by their fellowship with us there! How lightsome is our work, when we can take sweet counsel with them concerning it all! ’

His dread of any other union than one ‘in the Lord,’ for any young friend in whom he was interested, was often emphatically pressed on such as needed or sought his counsel; and he would further advise long and thorough acquaintance, before venturing on such a tie, with all its bearings, not only on

their temporal, but on their spiritual and eternal well-being.

In the following letter to his father-in-law, Mr. Robertson refers to the aged pastor of the congregation in Musselburgh, who had resigned his position during the troubles which preceded Mr. Robertson's settlement there :—

‘ 4th February 1846.

‘ I find this an unusually busy week, owing to arrangements that devolve upon me in connection with Mr. Black’s funeral ; so that I can send you little more than a note of remembrance and apology. . . . Mr. Black had a very quiet dismissal. It was just the standing still of the weary, worn-out wheels of life. He sustained, in connection with this congregation, the pastoral office for more than half a century. He retired from active duty about six years ago, and was followed into his retirement with much affection and esteem from his flock and friends. And now, at the age of eighty-three, he has been gathered to his rest. My connection with him (though it was not what is properly called a collegiate union) has been a source to me of much enjoyment. There has never been a single jarring note to mar our happy concord. He ever treated me with all the kindness of a parent, and my “heart safely trusted in him.” . . .’

‘ Blessed gospel that sustains you,’ said the younger minister to the elder, on his deathbed. ‘ Oh yes,’ responded the other, ‘ the very gospel you have been

preaching ever since you came among us. Preach on that way to the very end.'

The following extracts are taken from the discourse preached by Mr. Robertson after Mr. Black's funeral :—

‘ . . . One day, while walking in the garden, he appeared quite overpowered with emotion ; and, on being asked if he felt ill, he replied, “ No,—but, ‘ having loved His own, He loves them unto the end.’ ” . . .

‘ The last time we prayed together, Jesus was spoken of as a “ long-tried Friend.” He seized my hand and exclaimed, “ Long-tried Friend indeed ! tried and trusty ! ” and then he attempted to utter the lines :

‘ “ I'll praise my Saviour while I've breath,  
And, when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my noblest powers.  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures.” . . .

‘ . . . “ *One* there is above all others,” whose work is *finished*, and who is now the witness of ours. He is present with us always. He is present with us here. Christian ! let us catch His spirit, and we shall be wise. Let us lean on His arm, and we shall be strong. Let us identify ourselves more fully with His cause, and we shall see the salvation of God. Blessed Jesus, we are Thine. Thou hast loved us and given Thyself for us. We would live to Thee, die to Thee, and dwell with Thee for ever !

‘ Unconverted sinner, we weep for the dead. But who are the dead? The dead in Christ? No. *They* are “not dead, but sleeping.”

‘ We weep for the dead—the dead in sin. We weep for the dead, and we weep for *you*. Had I the tongues of men and of angels, could I find words in the languages of earth or heaven too strong to press upon your instant acceptance the glorious gospel of the blessed God? It is God’s own message, on God’s own authority, with God’s own evidence about remission of sins through the Saviour’s atoning blood, and renewal of nature by the Saviour’s quickening Spirit.

‘ This salvation is laid down at your door. It comes to you as a *free gift*—free as the cheerful light and the vital air. Receive it, and be safe. Receive it, and be happy. Receive it, and put away from you the shudderings of guilt and the fears of death. How shall we prevail with you? Would you tell us the way to your heart? We have tried almost every way. Is it yet in vain? We have shifted the position of the pulpit from Sabbath to Sabbath. We have placed it one day close by the gate of heaven, and another near the gate of hell. At one time, beneath Sinai, with its blazing lightnings and its pealing thunders; and at another time on Calvary, where we have lingered round the cross and drawn our arguments from its blood, and shame, and woe. And now to-day, we have been led to the “grave’s devouring mouth,” whence a voice comes back on your memory

and your heart, beseeching you, with all the solemn and moving accompaniments of eternity, to come and lie down, as a perishing man, on the truth and mercy of Jesus.

‘Yes, the “dead” seem to “speak,” and beseech you to come. And the living beseech you to come. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” We are waiting till you come. Your coming will change the character of this assembly. Though we mourn over the dead, we will rejoice over you. And of that joy your departed pastor will be one of the happy partakers.’

What an interested and loving member had been introduced into the circle from which he had chosen a wife, was shown both in his correspondence and in all his subsequent action.

To his sister-in-law he writes:—

‘How kind it has been in you to anticipate and relieve our anxieties, by writing so regularly in regard to our worthy father [who was seriously ill]. . . . We hope to hear to-morrow what answer has come from Dr. A. . . . But it is only in a very subordinate sense that we are in the hands of physicians or other advisers. We are in Divine Hands, the Hands that were pierced for us, the Hands from which no foreign power can pluck us. Yea, we are persuaded that even “Death shall not be able.”

‘We are delighted to know that his spirits are so stayed and cheerful, and trust that he will continue to be buoyed

up, and carried through, on the “Everlasting Arms.” . . . Health is a precious blessing, but the pearl of greatest price is Holiness.

‘I have just now been interrupted again for an hour . . . but it is one of those interruptions of which I wish we had many thousands more—a person under deep spiritual concern, eagerly asking the safe way into eternity.

‘I often think (and especially of late, when so many of them have been going hence) that we would do well to make use of our good old friends, as we do of our borrowed books. If we have a book of our own, we think we can read it at any time; but when we borrow a book, and know we must return it soon, we make the most of it (at least ought to make the most of it) while we have it. So, surely, should we be concerned to make use of pious friends, and to gain advantages from them, ere they leave us for better society and purer joys. Oh that He whose providence has so sweetly united us as *one family* here, may bring *every one* belonging to our circle to His own happy Home hereafter. . . .’

To his father-in-law :—

‘. . . I have been up during part of last night with the senior member of my session—a valuable old Christian of eighty-seven, who seems fast sinking under the accumulated weight of infirmities and years. . . . Perhaps you may remember how much I wished that you and he had met, when you first visited us; but he was unable to come.

‘He was long a prosperous merchant . . . has had many “sore adversities” during his long pilgrimage, but he has extracted the sweet from the bitter, and always speaks of his

trials as his “best mercies.” His experience now is a most impressive illustration of the divine power of the gospel to impart tranquillity and hope in a dying hour. There is perfect naturalness in his composure—nothing ostentatious, nothing enthusiastic. All is unfeigned simplicity. He said to me on Sabbath, “God is my Rock. He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, and He cannot lie. He is faithful and true.” Every word indeed, and every look, bespeaks his fullest confidence of being “accepted in the Beloved,” and that for him death has no sting.

‘ . . . How delightful to feel that the stroke, which severs every other tie, cannot touch the tie that connects a soul with Christ ! Whatever is meant by being in Christ is the same after death as before it. And, among those that are friends in Christ, there is a bond of union which eternity itself shall never wear to weakness.

‘ Let us be satisfied with nothing short of Christ’s having His proper place, *on the very throne of the hearts* of those we love, and *of our own*. Then shall we have true comfort in their death, and they in ours ; and we shall be bound up in the same bundle when the angel reapers shall gather in the harvest.

My beloved B. is an invaluable helper in my work of visiting the sick and dying ; and the more we try to labour for Christ, the happier we are. . . .’

From the Vale of Clyde, to the same :—

‘ . . . I feel disposed to address the excellent friend I am assisting in the words of the spouse, in Solomon’s Song : “ O thou that dwellest in the gardens ”—for the whole strath, for many miles, is one continued orchard, and, amid the rich

blossoming of the season, it presents one blaze of beauty. Oh the wondrous presence of God in all things! . . . In proportion as His influences are withheld all things languish; in proportion as they are again poured forth, all things are revived, and germinate, and blossom into blessedness.

‘We have just been praying that so “the earth may yield” unto us her spiritual “increase”—that so the Lord may (on this occasion) “cause righteousness and praise to spring forth”—that “our Beloved may come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.”’

To a ministerial brother Mr. Robertson wrote:—

‘To-day I am like L., “tired and weary,” and glad to keep at home. By this time I hope you are safely landed too among the endearments of your own fireside. Many little faces will have met you at the door with all their news. We often speak of yours as “the happy family.” “We thank our God on every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of ours for you all, making request with joy.” . . .

‘One of your remarks in your speech yesterday has led me to a text to-day. The remark was about the occasion given by such exhibitions as poor ——’s for scornful sarcasm, and for the direct and serious impeachment of Christianity; and the text is that in 2 Peter, which speaks of “The pernicious ways of those, by reason of whom the truth is evil spoken of.” If you are at any loss to fix on a topic, may we try this together? Under the emnui of this week I need all the stimulus of sympathy, and may not the theme be a “word in season”? The case is exciting many such

infidel sneers as you referred to. Would it not be interesting to show what compliments to the truth, and to its usual effects, these all imply?

‘But perhaps I may be wrong in adventuring on such delicate ground, and may see it best to abandon it, lest the intention be misunderstood.’

It hurt him to the core, and was as if his dearest friend had been maliciously maligned, when anything was said or done inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, or tending to misrepresent it to the world.

His adopted circle of friendship had good occasion, in the spring and summer of 1847, to prove and know the truth of his ‘brotherhood in adversity.’ A succession of trying bereavements drew out his sympathy and love ‘not in word only, but in deed,’ and strengthened ties that had already become strong.

Writing to Mr. M'Dowall, he says:—

‘My beloved Brother,—My heart would have impelled me to begin to write the instant I received yours, had I not been under the necessity of going out on duty and into the country. Now, when I am back to my desk, I could pour out to you *two hearts* full of sympathizing affection. You have a “fight of afflictions,” but you “shall not be greatly moved.” He who “took Israel from the furnace” will keep you, and be your “Saviour in the time of trouble.” It is when we feel the “land” very “weary,” that broadest, deepest, coolest becomes “the shadow of the Great Rock.”

It is sadly disappointing to us to miss what we had so fondly counted on—your beloved M.'s presence with us at the time we spoke of. But the claims of her health are paramount, and everything must yield to the means that seem necessary to its renovation. . . . I have often been in the hands of Dr. J., and have great confidence in his skill, of which I am in some sense the monument, under the guidance and blessing of the Infallible Physician. We shall not cease to plead that efficacy may be put into the means used for our dear sister's recovery to sweet established strength.'

Of a mutual friend, he adds:—

'Her mourning and conflicting experiences have given place to a peace that seems to flow through her heart like a river. She appears to have been led by the Spirit into much of the largeness of the love of God. She used to "weary herself in the greatness of her way," trying to make herself such a creature as God could love. Now her soul has found its centre of rest, disburdening conscience of its load in the presence of the cross, and leaning her head on that bosom out of which the Son came as the Father's gift to man. How this "rainbows the darkest cloud of sorrow." . . .

'I am in the *press* in more senses than one, correcting proofs and preparing for Sabbath—far, far behind. Will this be any comfort to you in your work to-morrow to know that you have in all respects possible the intense fellow-feeling of your very loving brother, J. R.'

Again—'We will write as often as posts will let us, and we are always getting at each other through God.'

Again—‘I have been defrauded by a visitor this afternoon of the time I meant to devote to you, but have left him for a little. . . . I will be more comforted by sending you a line or two than I could by being silent till another post. You do need “strong consolation.” And you have it. The Heavenly Refiner is evidently watching with tenderness and faithfulness the process through which the precious metal is passing. He is making her more and more a *choice one* in the furnace of affliction. We weep with you and rejoice with you by turns. Never does heaven appear so bright as when contrasted with those sorrows of earth. How very cheering the anticipation of it! Our ship is safe. The Pilot is on board. We are sure of reaching the quiet, happy haven. Oh, the wondrous beauty, the glorious sufficiency, the matchless suitableness of Jesus to our need! “In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.” . . .

‘Every gleam of sunshine, and every genial breath of summer, has a new charm to us just now, for we say to each other, many times a day, “This will bring back health to our beloved M.” Our hearts are never away from you. God will be with you always, “*the Comforter.*” Peace be with you in Christ Jesus. . . .’

To the sufferer herself he wrote:—‘Dearly beloved Sister,—Be of good cheer. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms. We want to join with you in singing “songs in the night.” And is not this the chorus of them all, “God is love”? I think it was you that first told me the story of the little girl who said, “That is my text, ‘God is love.’” . . . We do not wonder that “the joy of the Lord is your

strength," when you are looking to such joy-giving objects, and believing such joy-giving news. They produce joy of heart as necessarily as the finding of a treasure or the gaining of a victory, and your joy no man taketh from you. Drinking in our Heavenly Father's love, as reflected from the face of our Elder Brother, we are changed into the same image, from one glorious and glorifying degree of love to another. "Keeping ourselves in the love of God," we shall always have our own desire, inasmuch as we shall always have *His* will, which is *ours*. Submitting our will to His is only preferring a greater good to a less, as Jesus did in the garden. . . .

'We wish we could bear your burdens for you, but the impossibility of this makes us rejoice the more that He, who fainteth not as we would do, will, and does, carry both you and them. *He* has fully overcome, and by the victory of the Head, the living members must all be conquerors too. . . . You live in our hearts all the day long. . . .'

'By your languishing and pains you are brought into closest communion and co-heirship with Him who "endured the cross." His human exaltation is ascribed to that endurance as its cause. (Phil. ii. ; Heb. ii. 9, 10, 11.) Surely then, by the various forms of bodily suffering, as well as by any mode of faithfulness in active duties, we may be "conformed to the image of God's dear Son." When we look at a believer's afflictions in this light, when we think of their *perfecting* tendency, their close resemblance in character and purpose to the trials which the Saviour bore, it serves at least to abate our wonder, and disposes the mind to waiting adoration. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart."

‘Dr. Payson found it so, when he said in the midst of racking pain, “What a blessed thing it is to lose one’s will ! Since I have lost my will I have found happiness. There can be no such thing as disappointment to me, for I have no desires but that God’s will be done.”

‘I can never read the life of Payson without recollecting the sentiment of the holy Leighton, that “God has many sharp-cutting instruments and rough files for the polishing of His jewels, and those He especially esteems, and means to make the most resplendent, He has oftenest His tools upon.” . . .

‘We alternately speak of and pray for you, dear brother and sister.’ . . .

Again—‘Do not these lines express your experience :—

‘“O Lord my God, do Thou Thy holy will—  
I will lie still ;  
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm,  
And break the charm,  
Which lulls me, clinging to my Father’s breast,  
In perfect rest.”

‘I thought much of you yesterday, while preaching on *“the right way.”* Your Leader, dear sister, has not mistaken the way that you take. What here we call days of darkness will appear, by and bye, to have been among the brightest and fairest. All that seems good in God’s sight must be really good, for He cannot be deceived. His chastising love is the deepest love of all. Have you not now found resources of strength and grace in Him which you never knew before? . . .’

‘The end He promises is holy good. The means of its

production He Himself decides. It may be that the trials we are under are a fulfilment of the prayers we have often offered together. Are we crucified to the world? Are we weaned from the creature? Were not these our petitions? But we anticipated not the mode.

‘It needs more prayers now for grace to fix us in this resolve, when we perceive the way in which it is to be accomplished.

‘Let us desire holiness more than we fear the discipline necessary for its attainment. Let us leave to Him, who “sits as a Refiner,” the degree to which the furnace should be heated, in order to purify and brighten us, that we may reflect the glories of His image.’

These are a few extracts from many letters written at this time to the sorrowing circle. Besides every kind service he could think of, rendered otherwise, not a few cheering visits were paid to his dying friend—visits that brought a wondering feeling of sunshine, even to the childhood of the house, in the sick-room, as well as cheer to the mother, who, under his tender and appropriate ministrations, was made to ‘drink’ largely ‘of the river of God’s pleasures.’

Writing after the departure of this friend (closely followed by that of two others in near relationship), Mr. Robertson says, in near prospect of preaching there: ‘The partition between the pulpit and eternity looks thinner here than ordinary.’

## CHAPTER VIII.

### Edinburgh—Duncan Street.

1847-1862.

THE Musselburgh ministry was now drawing towards its close. In 1847, a Baptist chapel, in Duncan Street, Newington, Edinburgh, was advertised for sale, and as the field around seemed a desirable one in which to carry on Christian work, three United Presbyterians, after anxious consultation with members of the Edinburgh Presbytery and others, resolved to secure the building for a new cause, in connection with their denomination.

These three had the warm sympathy of the Revs. Dr. John Brown of Broughton Place, Dr. Robertson of Portsburgh, and others ; and it is specially worthy of mention that Dr. Robertson, with characteristic Christian spirit, suggested to those of his flock who lived in Newington to cast in their lot with them, and thus help on the cause of peaceful church extension. Some of his most valued and useful members took his advice.

When the proprietors of the Baptist chapel knew

of the proposal, they generously handed over the building to their brethren, at £300 less than the price originally sought, on the understanding that their successors would take up the schools and the mission district of Causewayside, in which they had laboured for many years. ‘There was ample field of usefulness for an enterprising missionary church.’

A small nucleus gathered in this chapel (seated for 624) as a preaching-station, on 9th January 1848, and was afterwards constituted into a congregation, by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, in February. The members of Presbytery conducted the Sabbath services in turn. Of these, Mr. Robertson was one, and, after hearing him, the congregation addressed a hearty and unanimous call to him, in June 1848, to become their pastor.

They ‘had nothing to offer Mr. Robertson,’ they said, ‘in addition to abundance of hard and harassing labour, but hearty co-operation in prosecuting the great work which they knew he had at heart.’ They ‘refrained from holding out to him any inducement that savoured of the nature of a pecuniary bribe,’ knowing by how much higher motives he was actuated, and ‘fearing that any such would just have gone to ruin their fondest expectations.’

It was urged by the Musselburgh people, that, out of the mere remnant of a congregation, the foundation of a truly prosperous church had been laid; but that there was every risk of the progress of this spiritual

building being arrested, and of ruin and decay supervening, if the builder was withdrawn.

Through the labours of the last seven years, it had risen in strength and usefulness to 'a model of a good working congregation.' Under the influence of the gospel, set forth from Sabbath to Sabbath, fresh and full of fragrance, and falling like dew from heaven on believing souls, 'there had arisen a well-cared-for Sabbath school,' with teachers of high-toned piety, who now made a special appeal to him. There were also advanced classes of young men and women, gathered not only from the congregation but beyond its pale, and anxiously thirsting for religious instruction; weekly prayer-meetings; a maternal society; church meetings from time to time, at which the members acknowledged one another as professing brethren and sisters in the Lord, and sought each other's welfare; a missionary society, with its collectors; a Christian instruction society, with its agents labouring in the villages around, and scattering the words of eternal life.

The pressure put upon him to remain was indeed very strong; and he was so much perplexed as to his duty in the matter, that in the end he left the decision in the hands of his brethren.

To the Presbytery he said:—

'With the Commissioners from both places I most thoroughly accord in the principle, that we, who are ministers of Christ, are at liberty to say to our people, "We

are not yours, neither are we our own ;” nay, that we are bound to consider well how and where we may best promote His interest who died for ours. . . .

‘The fear of doing wrong is sometimes an impediment in the way of doing right. The mind becomes fevered with anxiety. It is then that one, judging in his own cause, is in danger of laying too much stress on what are called the “openings,” or “leadings,” which Providence is supposed to exhibit by outward signs and peculiar events. . . . The very same things vary in their hue and complexion according to the bias with which they are regarded. . . .

‘As regards the *majus*, *bonum ecclesiae*, I must allude to one or two things on which I would far rather restrain myself, and seal them up in silence, were it not that they furnish important elements of judgment.

‘The Presbytery have already been reminded of (it would not be easy for some of them soon to forget) the hapless singularity of their own crippled and bleeding cause in Musselburgh, at the time when you sent me there, as your willing servant for Jesus’ sake. The little remnant of people had a great fight of afflictions. . . . But God be praised that their night of weeping was followed by the morning joy. . . . The hand of the Lord hath done it. . . .

‘It was the hope of seeing this, which cheered whatever of sore trial, and hazard to life itself, the experiment imposed. The call that places me here to-day seems, in many respects, a call to go through the same trying experiment again. Not that there is at Newington any broken and desolated wall to be built in troublous times, with a trowel in the one hand and a sword in the other. But certain it is, that the present nucleus of membership at Newington

is very much the same as I found at Musselburgh, so that, it is just after beginning to enjoy the recompense “where-with the Christian mower filleth his hand, and he that bindeth sheaves his bosom,” that I am invited to tread anew what may seem the empty furrow. . . .

‘On all such peaceful Church extension, prosecuted under auspices so animating, may the broadest benedictions of the Church’s Head descend! Its failure would be very calamitous; its prosperity will be very joyous. . . . When I remember that a minister’s anxiety *ought* to be to exert himself where exertion is most needed, without allowing his own little convenience more than a feather’s weight in the balance — you need not wonder that I should have some doubts whether the problematic, and remoter good, of going to Newington, may not find a counterpoise in the more immediate evils connected with a vacancy in Bridge Street. . . .

‘May I beg your indulgence while I allude to the other difficulty, which is of a personal character. It respects health, which to a minister is almost equivalent to life, . . . and which may not warrant any confident expectation of its being quite a match for such another lengthened course of *extra* toil and care. . . .

‘Divesting myself, as far as I can, of all reserve or bias, I put the case into your hands, earnestly requesting you to strike the balance, and to dispose of me, and of any service I can render, to what seems to you the best advantage, in the best of causes. I am afraid of being wedded to any methods or means of my own. I am afraid of having my judgment unduly swayed by feeling. . . . I have only this “Urim” to consult, and whatever the answer be, I think I

shall have little need to doubt that “the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” Is not “the sound of your Master’s feet behind you”? and the responding voice, “Behold I will lead the blind by a way that they know not.” “This is the way, walk ye in it.” . . .’

The members of Presbytery deferred their decision till a later meeting, at which they gave their judgment in favour of the new charge. The prospect of the change, with the severing of the old ties, and doubts as to his having strength for the duties before him, brought much anxiety. The induction took place on Wednesday, 11th October 1848.

‘ 21st November.

‘ When I tell you that I am so overburdened with work as to have little more than four hours’ sleep at night, and scarcely time for meals during the day, you will not think it strange that I was so long in writing. This is the heaviest labour I ever had in hand, but we are not without cheering encouragement. . . .

‘ I send you a specimen of the children’s recollections of your sermon on Solomon. They are first attempts; for everything has to be begun here. Already we have a Sabbath school of more than 100 children, with 15 teachers and superintendent; an advanced female class also of 32, and a young men’s class in process of being formed this week. “The number of the names” (in church membership) is about 120. To the 42 with whom we started, 68 were added at last communion, and some have been gathered since that time.

‘A Christian Instruction Scheme, to be wrought by the ladies, on a somewhat new principle, has likewise been arranged. The church attendance has been steady in the forenoons, and increasing in the afternoons—nearly filling the *house*. But my strength is very inadequate to the incessant demands made on it, and I have often reason to fear it will sink under them entirely. In what work, however, can we be more blissfully “*spent*”?’

‘20th December 1848.

‘. . . Dear A.’s letter gave us much delight, with all its news and its merry notes. . . . I am surrounded with mercy, and not a day passes over me but I say, “Who should be thankful if I am not?” O my brother, help me to put on, and to wear that seemly attire, “the garment of praise.”

‘My work continues very heavy, but I have more strength for it than I had at first, and the Lord manifestly smiles on it.

‘Since the cause became self-supporting, we have entered on missionary work, and are this week on the point of engaging a home mission agent. About £30 per annum is already guaranteed, by a few members, for this primary object. There have gathered around us some of the most active and devoted Christians with whom I have ever met. . . . I have few minutes all day that I can call my own. . . .’

‘27th Jan. 1849.

‘We may smell the flowers of earth as we pass, but let us not tarry. “Behold the Bridegroom cometh.” . . .’

It took no little courage, with an infant cause just

formed there, to set all the desirable machinery of a working church in lively motion. But this was to be no hive of drones.

The ordinary schemes immediately started, included a vigorous Sabbath school (out of which, owing to ignorance discovered there, grew week-evening classes, and soon a week-day school), the minister's advanced classes for young men<sup>1</sup> and women (held at separate times), a maternal meeting, a weekly prayer-meeting, adult and juvenile missionary associations. There was also a special church meeting, on the first Sabbath of each month, for members alone, to bind them more closely in the bonds of Christian affection, and to give opportunity for the unreserved expression of thought and feeling on topics bearing on Christian life and work. At this meeting the new members were introduced, previous to each communion. A fresh element was early brought into it, by the gathering there 'of the baptized children of the church, that they might be reminded of the meaning of their baptism, of the nature of the obligations they were expected personally to renew, and that they might be commended to God in solemn prayer.'

In the quarterly sermons preached to the children their wants were still further remembered.

<sup>1</sup> The young men's class came, during its second or third year, under the care of Mr. Benjamin H. Blyth, and afterwards under that of Mr. James Young, till his death, both elders, and highly-prized co-workers with their pastor, strengthening his hands in every way possible to them.

By the 14th of January 1849 (about three months after Mr. Robertson's induction), the home missionary referred to, who was selected from among the members themselves, had begun his labours in the Causewayside. To further his work, the mission district was divided into eighteen sections (allowing twelve or fifteen families to a section), and visited by both ladies and gentlemen of the congregation, as 'Christian instruction agents.'

Thus a large number of the members was brought into direct contact with the people of the district, the children there were cared for, and wholesome literature of various kinds was distributed.

Of this work in its early days, Mr. Robertson says:—

'They will find it have a powerful influence on their personal sanctification. Their own knowledge of the gospel will be corrected and enlarged by repeated demands for its exercise, and their own impressions of its preciousness will become sensibly deepened by every attempt to convey it to the hearts of others.

'Where twenty-four church members consecrate to such exertion a single hour in the week, it is well-nigh equal to the addition of a new agent to the ranks of our valuable home missionaries. . . . We regard this scheme as only the revival of the great Christian principle, that all who know Christ should make Him known. It is only leading us back to the apostolic plan of "teaching from house to house." It is as old as Christianity. It is a part of Christianity. It is Christ's own ordinance, as truly as the preaching of the

gospel in the sanctuary. Never will the labours of the most devoted city missionaries prove sufficient, by themselves, to bear in successfully or permanently on the fermenting mass of depravity around us. The divinely-appointed instrumentality, by which it is to be penetrated with the healing influence of the gospel, is the combined agency of all the members of Christ's Church, acting harmoniously, and acting on system. How rich is the Church in undeveloped power! Were that power only brought out from the napkins in which it is shrouded, and from under the bushels where it is hid, and placed in Christ's hand, and at Christ's disposal, how soon might all our streets, and alleys, and obscurest recesses be pervaded with the light of the knowledge of God's glory! how soon might "the city be flourishing," and filled with "the beauties of holiness"!

Within four years the Christian instruction visitors extended their labours to several outlying hamlets, in which, ultimately, a second missionary, with all the usual organizations of a mission, was established.

Experience of the wants of the mission district at an early stage, and of the great barrier to the prosecution of the work there in the drinking habits of the people, resulted in the formation of a Total Abstinence Society, which was joined at once by a goodly number of those for whom it was intended; and efforts were also made to interest the young in the same, by weekly meetings in the school-room. This continued, throughout, a prominent feature in the home mission work.

In the course of a few years, 'the improvement

which had taken place among the population of the district, and the benefits conferred by the mission, were manifest to the merest observer. This was acknowledged by the people themselves, as well as by many residents in the neighbourhood, who, at various times, volunteered their grateful testimony. The swarm of unwashed, untrained youngsters, that used to infest the district, and annoy the neighbourhood, had disappeared.'

Altogether, the number of the young connected with the church and mission districts, under religious instruction, was not less than five hundred; whilst those on the roll of the day-school—now under four teachers—numbered 374.

It was ascertained, by the visits of the missionaries, at this period, that there were no children, capable of attending, who were not at school, provision being made, by individual private benevolence, for paying the fees of those whose parents or guardians were unable to do so.

This continued to be a school for a full secular education, in all its branches, combined with religious instruction; the congregation, true to its principles, refusing all Government grants, and supporting it by its own contributions. After the passing of the Education Act, this school was handed over in 1872 to the School Board. The people of the church were soon able to rid themselves of the burden of debt, and to build besides school and mission premises, at a cost of

£600. At this time (1856) Mr. Robertson writes: 'We had one of our social meetings *among ourselves*, when it was reported that there had been raised, during the past twelvemonth, considerably more than £1200. The debt on church and school property, which stood over at £1800, is now brought to a perpetual end. And in April next we hope to celebrate our emancipation.'

These 'social meetings among ourselves' were, like everything else, meant to be special means of grace, when the conventionalities that belong to the world were laid aside, and the members met on a common footing, with the understanding: 'One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.' One moving spirit was among them, bringing those together that might value or help each other, and making all easy, and genial, and kindly—drawing out the special talents of some for the benefit of all, and never failing to give the cast of his own lofty and sacred aims to the whole.

Many recall, with much warmth, the heart and homeliness of those days in the old but 'amiable tabernacle,' with a flock growing in numbers year by year, and in loving harmony with one another, in all congregational and Christian work. Nothing could be more like what we may suppose the circle of the early Church to have been. It seemed natural for them to adopt, for some of their number, such names as 'Paul,' and 'Barnabas,' and 'Phebe our sister.'

Thus he strikes the keynote for a Christian social meeting in his student days :—

‘Can we suppress the thrill of affectionate interest in each other, even were we to try the experiment? Can any heart here, by any effort, go into cold and jealous calculation of comparative rank or standing with any one who sits beside you, or who addresses you? Perish the thought! All such considerations are swallowed up, sunk, lost in the deep and delightful consciousness that we are associated with the friends of Jesus—loved by our Common Father, sanctified by our Common Comforter, heirs of the Common Salvation. It will be so if, through mercy, we reach heaven. Why should it for a moment be otherwise on earth? In order that our meeting may image the harmony and happiness of heaven, one thing is indispensably necessary, that, as on a memorable occasion in Cana of Galilee, Jesus shall be invited to the feast to honour it by His presence and hallow it by His blessing,’ etc. etc.

The same keynote was sounded in these congregational gatherings, held with the view of keeping up mutual acquaintance and fellowship, and giving them further impetus for everyday life.

It was no empty, formal invitation that Jesus received to the feast, as if there were little concern whether He came or not; but such a one as would have made pastor and people disappointed if He was not with them, ‘to honour it by His presence, and hallow it by His blessing.’ It is unnecessary to add that the character of the entertainment provided was

in harmony with the Divine fellowship desired and expected.

To an absent member of the congregation, he writes :

‘24th February 1862.

‘How much I wish you had been with us to enjoy our delightful social meeting of the teachers last night. It was a time of great enjoyment—quite like an “ordinance ;” and we parted saying, “The Lord has been with us *of a truth.*” But I am glad you are off for change, and I fondly trust you will return with many materials for a “new song.” Jesus is the “Saviour of the *body,*” and we must take good care of His property. May He keep you as the apple of His eye. How intensely tender is that image ! Bodily infirmity cannot touch your life—your *true* life—the life hid with Christ in God. With what confidence, and with what assured expectation, you may put yourself wholly into the hands of the Infallible Physician. The more simple and full our faith in *His finished work,* the more rapid and sure will be our spiritual healing.’

The Rev. John Young, afterwards colleague and son-in-law to Mr. Robertson (who, previous to his ordination, had been connected with the congregation for many years, and had rendered much valued help in many departments of its work), says :—

‘As early as 1859 or 1860, there were originated two Sabbath forenoon children’s services (for the mission districts)—long before Foundry Boys’ Societies or so-called children’s churches came into fashion. They still flourish ; and never has there been any friction between them and

the church, as care has always been taken that they neither lessened the attendance in “the family pew,” nor drained away from the church services more than two or three adults to take charge.’

Whether or not a statement as satisfactory can be always made in regard to children’s churches, may be doubted. Mr. Robertson, in later years, fully appreciated the difficulties arising in connection with them, and became suspicious as to what the outcome might be in the future, in fostering a desultory church attendance. On a Sabbath forenoon’s visit to a service of this kind in another city, when hundreds of adults were crowding to the gallery, the question was put to him, ‘Why are there so many grown-up people here? I thought it was for children;’ and he replied, ‘Ah, that’s the sore bit of these children’s services! When they become men and women they just *continue* coming here.’

From the foregoing it will be seen, to use Mr. Young’s words—

‘How thoroughly the character impressed upon the church from the beginning, under Mr. Robertson’s ministry, was that of a home mission one. It was territorial in the best sense of the term. It lived and laboured, from its infancy, for the Causewayside, and it blended into a membership truly one in spirit, the *suburban* and *mission* classes in its neighbourhood. The aim in Newington has always been to have a thorough mixture of classes; and all arrangements as to seat-holding, social gatherings, etc., have been made

subservient to giving to the poorest a home-feeling in its membership. There has been no undue haste to draft into the communion of the church those impressed at our mission meetings, or residing in the mission district; but many of our best members have been won through the mission, and the percentage of disappointments has been very small.'

The following is from the pen of an eminent Glasgow physician, Dr. Yellowlees, who was at this time a student at Edinburgh University, and attended Mr. Robertson's ministry:—

‘ You ask me for reminiscences of Mr. Robertson and “Duncan Street” in my student days. It is like asking for some old song, of which you can recall only fragments, though its cadence and pathos are unforgotten. It is like asking an analysis of some familiar friend, whom you felt to be so good and true, that you never thought of cataloguing his virtues.

‘ “Duncan Street” was—just Duncan Street. You had to feel it, before you could understand it. And Duncan Street was just what James Robertson made it. Never did congregation more truly reflect its pastor, for never did pastor more truly put himself into his work.

‘ In him the life and work of the congregation centred, and from him they took their tone. No wonder, then, that the spirit of the church was Christian fellowship in Christian work, and that brotherly love abounded. There were no strangers in Duncan Street; for if strangers came they instantly became friends, attracted and magnetized by the pervading spirit. To “belong to Duncan Street” was a bond of friendship of no common kind, and it implied to my-

self, and to many another student, an amount of personal interest and real kindness which can never be forgotten, and which commended the gospel to us as nothing else could have done.

‘This spirit of fellowship pervaded all the congregational work. Each department of it interested all, and was quickened and sustained by the common interest. The congregational social meetings were like a large family gathering than anything else ; and our minister was never more in his element than when there, promoting the Christian fellowship in which he so rejoiced. In the intervals of the business he would move quietly about the room, with a smile or a word for every one near him. He remembered names, faces, and personal circumstances with wonderful accuracy, and made his people known to each other with such happy tact and ease that each deemed it a favour.

‘Perhaps before you knew he was near you, you would find his arm over your shoulder, with—“And when did you hear from your mother ? I wish there were more like *her*.” If there’s a better way of getting at the heart of a lonely student than *that*, I don’t know it. But such tact was his special gift. He could put himself alongside others with singular ease, and could so slide into their heart and feelings, that they felt as if he had been there all the while. It was this faculty that made his visits so welcome in sickness, and so comforting in sorrow.

‘In the congregational Sabbath school he was the same, alike with teachers and scholars. The lambs of the flock were his peculiar care, and however long or fatiguing the services in the church had been, he had always some tender words for them in closing the school.

‘ If you met him in the street he was the same. He would take your arm and walk along with you, ask about your friends, and your studies, brighten you with some home allusion, tell you some story leaving you to find its lesson, and then probably say, “ Man, I wish you would come over to breakfast on Wednesday—eight o’clock, you know—and you’ll get away in time for your classes ; and I’ll ask James —, and James —, and Henry —, and the rest ; and there’s a new student I want you to know. It aye does my heart good to see you young men.” Thus he went about bringing sunshine. How much brighter life would be if we all tried to do likewise !

‘ When we met at breakfast, he seemed as if it truly *did* do his heart good, but the real gain was ours. The kind inquiries and kinder home reminiscences about each of us, the genial way in which he brought out the most reticent, and the wise way in which he could differ without wounding, did us far more good than we knew ; while Mrs. Robertson’s motherly gentleness—never to be forgotten by me—made it almost like a glimpse of home.

‘ The quarterly sermon to the children was another feature of Duncan Street, which no retrospect could omit. They were great occasions. The children and their teachers sat in the centre of the church, and every part of the building was crowded. The text was always read by one of the children—a proud, but trying distinction. In preaching, Mr. Robertson put questions to the children, and the word of commendation elicited by a good reply was more valued than the costliest prize. A verse or two of some favourite hymn was always introduced during the sermon —sometimes more than once, and sung by the children

with great fervour. The sermons were simple, tender, pointed, and memorable. His whole heart went out to the little ones. His administration of baptism was, for the like reason, very tender and impressive.

‘Perhaps Mr. Robertson’s ministry was at its best in the Duncan Street period. He felt sustained by a devoted and earnest people, who had gathered around him, and he was still unfretted by the cares and anxieties of a large congregation.

‘In the pulpit you felt that he was at home, and strong in his Master’s strength. His prayers were always remarkable—so lofty, direct, tender, and trustful. In private they were often yet more striking, from his peculiar felicity in introducing personal circumstances or local allusions, and so clothing common things with a new significance. His preaching appealed more to the heart than to the head, but its tender earnestness gave it wonderful power, and it was full of Christ crucified. He liked to dwell on favourite themes, and was prone to picture and amplify, but he could also be terse and pointed. He used contrast, antithesis, and alliteration largely, and often put the truth in a most memorable way with their aid. Some of his sentences come back to me still like echoes of other days.

‘But after all I have now written—and it is far more than I had intended—I feel that my first words were right. You cannot tell what Duncan Street was to those who were not there. You could not understand it till you felt it, and scarcely then;—but “that we were in Duncan Street” is still the bond of some of my best friendships. To us the church monopolized the whole street, and somehow the old folk never took so kindly to the new church at Grange Road.

It was *not* Duncan Street. I have never seen the same spirit anywhere else, and I miss it sadly. When I see city churches where the minister rarely enters his Sabbath school, where he can scarcely know his members by sight, and where the members scarcely know each other, I cannot but fear that we are in danger of taking false standards wherewith to measure the life of our congregations. Huge membership, fine architecture, swelling organs, and big collections would be very poor substitutes for the spirit of Duncan Street.'

Reference has been made in the foregoing recollections to the children's services as being 'great occasions' in Mr. Robertson's church at home. They were in no less degree 'great occasions' away from home, wherever it was announced that Mr. Robertson was to preach a children's sermon. It was a feature in his ministry that began early, and continued in growing intensity and interest on to its close. His bright, joyous, sympathetic nature ever drew the young irresistibly around him.

One of these services about this time comes vividly to mind, though many years have passed away since. It was on a Sabbath evening in the church in Stirling in which he had himself sat when a boy. All the Sabbath schools in the town and neighbourhood were congregated together, and long before the hour of meeting the spacious house was crowded in every part, the passages and pulpit stairs and even the pulpit itself being thronged with children, all in eager ex-

pectation. It was a sight the preacher obviously loved to see, as with beaming countenance he threaded his way slowly from the vestry with a smile for each as he passed, and a pat on the shoulder for some.

When he had announced where his text was to be found, he asked if ‘any child would be good enough to read it.’ It was before these modern days of youthful development in that direction, and the large audience held its breath for an instant or two, when a responsive movement was observed *behind* the preacher. Mr. Robertson, turning round and taking a little boy by the hand, said, ‘Here is a little man who is kindly going to read my text for me;’ and in clear, distinct tones, slowly and reverently the words were read: ‘And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels’ (Mal. iii. 17).<sup>1</sup> ‘Thank you, my little boy,’ said Mr. Robertson when he had finished. ‘When you grow up to be a man, I hope you will become a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, and read many such texts from all the pulpits round.’ The ‘little boy’ is now Professor Henry Drummond, of the Free Church College, Glasgow, whose name as that of an author and an evangelist is so familiar to us all.

We subjoin an address delivered many years later by Mr. Robertson, at a Saturday children’s gathering in Glasgow, in connection with the ‘Flower Mission,’ an institution which, with its sympathetic ministrations

<sup>1</sup> This sermon is given at p. 307 of this volume.

and sweet comfort, has been a power for good in our large cities to many a weary and sorrowful soul.

### Flowers.

Guess where to find my text? to find it in a field, to find it among the rich green grass, from which there comes up a fresh, delicious smell.

I stooped down, and found my text nestling there, underneath some broad leaves, and hanging down its head upon a slender stalk. It was a sweet spring flower. I plucked it, and admired it, and put it in there, in my button-hole. It gave me some thoughts, that led me to remember you, and to remember a little ditty I have often heard dear children singing—

‘Buttercups and daisies, oh the pretty flowers,  
Coming in the spring-time, to tell of sunny hours.’

‘The Flower Mission’—you have all heard of it. Last Thursday evening I was talking with one of the kind friends who visit in the Infirmary, and sing gospel hymns to the poor sufferers there, and I was happy to hear that the Flower Mission had begun again, as in former years; and this is one of the ways in which you children may make yourselves very useful, gathering flowers, and making them into bouquets or posies to brighten up and cheer the dull ward of the sick, like sweet smiles and shining stars of heaven.

Flowers for Jesus! Who will gather flowers for

Jesus in spring and summer? He who said to Mary, when she broke the box and poured the ointment on His head, 'She hath done what she could,' will rejoice in everything that is done from love to Him. To every such flower-gatherer He will say when He comes in His glory, 'I was sick, and ye visited me: Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.'

So I was led to take as my topic to-day, what you will read for me in Song of Solomon ii. verses 10-13:

'My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.'

'For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

'The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

'The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.'

I have my eye particularly on these six words in the beginning of verse 12: 'The flowers appear on the earth.'

I never knew a child who was not fond of flowers. I cannot forget the unspeakable delight it was to me, when quite a child, to watch the little green points of the crocus breaking through the ground, because they told me that spring flowers were going to 'appear on the earth.' I trust God will let me

love the flowers, and the singing of the birds, as long as I live here. Oh that our hearts may continue brimful of praise to Him, for the joy they bring us, year by year, at the first burst of spring !

There was a great man once, who thought it so good for everybody to see and love God's beautiful gift of flowers, that he used to say to his friends, ' If you have money enough to buy two loaves, you may buy *one* loaf, but be sure to buy along with it a bunch of flowers.' Another who is now with Jesus, had, when on her dying-bed, a flower put into her hand. She turned it round and round, looking earnestly at it, and then said, ' It is God's flower, and it is so God-like.' In that flower, she loved Him who made it, even that Saviour dear, who, when sitting on a mountain in the midst of flowers, stooped down and picked up one, as He spoke to the people, and held it in His hand, and said, ' Consider the lilies.' You may read it in Matthew vi. 28. ' Consider the lilies'—the flowers of the field. Is not this the time for considering them, when they are beginning to bud and bloom on every side ?

What is it to consider them ? It is something more than looking at them or smelling them, something more than making them into daisy chains, or cowslip wreaths, and wearing them on your breast. To ' consider ' them is to think much about them. It is to think what the flowers would say if they had tongues and could speak.

Well, what would they say ?

1. The flowers would say : ‘There is a God who created us, and though there are ten thousand different kinds of us, He has put us all in our right places. Some of us grow on the hill-sides, and some of us grow in the valleys ; some on the water’s edge, and some far away in the wilderness.’ Surely God loves flowers, for He first planted a garden in Eden, and put in it every plant that was beautiful to look upon ; and ‘God saw that it was good.’

Go on, pretty flowers, go on teaching us !

What ! Can a flower be a teacher to you and to me ? Yes, a dumb teacher. It is as silent teachers that flowers have been given us. God has not sent flowers to feed us, or to make us rich. Though there were not a flower in all the world, we would have food, and raiment, and riches, all the same.

But all God’s handiworks must be of some use, and He has raised up these lovely little teachers to speak to us, from under their green leaves, lessons about Himself.

The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ But nature says in *her* heart, and in every colour and feature of her flushing face, ‘There is a God—an only wise God—and He is *here* !’

How wise God is ! and what a worker of wonders ! Take a magnifying glass. Examine with it the most delicate web that ever came out of the looms of Paisley or Manchester, and the threads you would see looking rude and rough, almost like cable ropes.

But pluck the leaf of a lily, and put it under your microscope. What glorious tints are laid open to you ! And if your glass were a thousand times stronger, the beauties would be a thousand times more.

Yonder, on the table in one of your houses, isn't there a bunch of artificial flowers, with a wax lily among the rest ? How ingenious the lady who fashioned it ! But take it near. Where is the life, the growth, the freshness and fragrance of the living flower ? Bees soon know the difference.

Look at them through your microscope. This wax one is like coarse canvas. But in God's you see all the minute pores through which it draws in gas like breath. Along its tiny veins, its blood, the sap is flowing. Its roots go hunting down into the earth for meat and drink, and both are pumped up, through the stem, to the milk-white cup—the smelling-bottle at the top. ‘Verily this is the finger of God.’ And when God is the artist, how perfect is the painting of His flowers ! I recollect the exclamation of a good friend, who held a lily in his right hand, and a clod of black earth in his left. He said : ‘What a God must our God be, who is always producing the like of *this* out of the like of *that* !’ And I could tell you of a minister, who had many sore trials to bear, and who was tempted, in the midst of them, to doubt the Word of God. When in this miserable state of mind, he was riding one afternoon on horseback, along a thickly-shaded path, when

from one of the trees overhead there came a little leaf trembling down (you know how a leaf goes, this way and that way, when it falls), and it alighted right in front of him on the saddle. He took it up, and turned it over, and, as the sun was shining through the trees, and as he held it up to the sunlight, he was struck with all its little veins, so much more exquisite than the finest lace of man's making, and he said to himself, 'Surely this leaf has come from heaven at this moment to put my doubts to shame, and to tell me I have a Father yet, who is too wise to err.' So his fetters were broken, and 'he went on his way rejoicing' in God. Didn't he truly find tongues in the tree from which the leaf had fallen!

‘How manifold, Lord, are Thy works,  
In wisdom Thou hast made them all.’

Say away, pretty flowers! what else have you to teach us?

2. Listen! they are saying, 'God is love, faithful love. Great is His faithfulness.'

Yes, my children, the lengthening days are telling it, the birds are singing it, the flowers are blooming it! It is breaking abroad this morning in all the balmy air.

Did God's own hand raise that flower on its stem with all its rich minglings of colour? Then God must love beauty. And may we not expect that God will be tender Himself? The dearest things we have

we can bring to Him,—our wounded feelings, our trembling hopes, our children when they are sick, or when they are seeking salvation, and our own souls when they are all sensibility and sorrow. Yes, all these we may bring to Him Whose mercy is tender mercy, Whose kindness is loving-kindness.

This is the use of flowers—

‘To comfort man,—to whisper hope  
Whene’er his faith is dim,  
For God who careth for the flowers  
Will much more care for him.’

This was what Jesus was seeking to make the disciples understand, when He said, ‘Consider the lilies.’

Read, when you get home, the latter part of that 6th chapter of Matthew, from the 25th verse downwards, and you will find Him first pointing to the sparrows, as they darted to and fro beneath the bright blue sky.

Behold these fowls (says He), see how happy they are ! Who keeps Robin Redbreast’s cupboard ? Surely the God who feeds His birds will never starve His bairns !

And it is the very same teaching He repeats.

Look at the lilies,—how they grow. Not by being careworn ; no, their fair leaves are never fretted by a single wrinkle of anxiety. Are they ever heard to cry, ‘When will that hot sun set ? When will the next shower come ?’

Are you not much better than they—you, who have souls that shall never fade away ?

And will your Father forget you, while He still remembers them ? Mungo Park, the African traveller, was at one time surrounded by savage beasts, and still more savage men, who plundered him, and left him almost half-dead, among barren rocks and burning sands. ‘ In a cleft of a rock,’ said he, ‘ I caught a glimpse of a lovely little green tuft of moss, not bigger than the tip of my finger. It looked to me like a smile from God. I said, ‘ I must not think myself forgotten or forsaken. Poor and needy though I be, the God of that tuft cares for me.’ So his heart grew brave again. His limbs gradually recovered strength, and he went hopefully forward, till he found a place of refreshing and repose. If the fresh verdure of that little plant saved his life—as it probably did—surely the blooming of all the flowers we see around us may still save our faith, may still lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees. And just what the small bit of moss was to Mungo Park, Jesus intends the lilies to be to us. The best lesson taught by them is trust. ‘ Have faith in God,’ ‘ only trust Him.’

Go on, pretty flowers, go on talking and teaching us.

What other lessons would you have us learn ?

Hearken, what they are saying—

3. Children ought never to be proud—proud of their dress.

I once heard of a girl who stayed at home from the Sabbath school for weeks, because she had not got a small piece of finery, like some of her companions, and she was too proud to show herself at school without. Ah ! such girls must be sent to the lily's school again. Has not Jesus already sent them there, when He said, 'Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these' ?

'There's not a yellow buttercup, returning with the spring,  
But it can show a golden crown, as bright as any king.  
The red rose and the lily give that charm of summer day,  
There's not a lady in the land so finely dressed as they.'

Any more to say, pretty flowers ? Any more ?

4. Yes, one word more, as you find it in Isa. xl. 6 :

'All flesh is grass, and all the *goodliness* thereof as the flower of the field.'

Yes, all the dear children here may be likened to spring flowers. For what ? For freshness and beauty.

I do delight in the early bloom of the round face of a little child. But just as when you take a flower and pull it to pieces, it is so pretty inside, so the soul that is within you, when sheltered by Christ's side, and beautified with Christ's salvation, is very beautiful, very beautiful indeed.

An excellent Christian lady, well known by the name of Charlotte Elizabeth, took great pains for the salvation of a poor deaf and dumb Irish boy, called John Brett, and she was accustomed to give

him the familiar flower name, 'My Shamrock.' Since he could only make signs, he used to say that God looked at his prayer. Once when asked how he felt, he answered by signs, 'Jack prayed—God looked at Jack's prayer. Jack knows that Jesus loves poor Jack. Jack very, very much love Jesus. Jack very much hate Devil. Go away, Devil, go away.'

[Another story connected with this boy would be told here, but the manuscript does not give it in full—only the words: 'Bad . . drop of blood . . Black page . . made all white . . nothing . . going away to see the Dear Red Hand.]

Converted children may be likened to flowers for usefulness as well as for beauty.

Flowers are very useful. They brighten up the faces of those who look at them in the wards of a hospital. They comfort many a lonely sick room.

It is told of a Frenchman, who was a State prisoner for many months and years, that his great delight was a small flower that grew in the little yard belonging to his cell. It had sprung up between two flagstones, and when it began to droop for want of more room, he sent a petition to the Emperor to allow the two flagstones to be lifted up. When the Emperor gave leave for this his gratitude was unbounded, because it gave him the companionship of his favourite flower.

I give it on the authority of that admirable Christian lady, Miss Marsh, that she sent to a thoughtless, bad man, when he was ill, a lovely crimson

azalea, and he used to say that he loved that flower more than any other that ever grew, because it brought to his memory and kept before his mind that verse, which she had repeated to him, and which was the means of bringing him to the Saviour, ‘ Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’

Charlotte Elizabeth had sweet thoughts about the flowers in her garden, such as no one else had. With many of the flowers, she joined recollections of her beloved friends ; and I would like to recommend it to you, my young friends, as a very pleasant exercise, to put down a list of the names of the children of the Bible, and call them after different flowers, according to your own judgment of what suits them best.

For instance, there is little Samuel, who early served the Lord. Might you not put over against his name the Snowdrop ? because the snowdrop is such an early spring flower, and so very beautiful.

There is little Moses, who was drawn out of the water. Might you not put over against his name the Water-lily ?

Little Timothy, who was so quiet and humble a learner of his Bible, and from a child wise to salvation. Might you not call him the Violet ?

And the little Hebrew maid, who dressed the hair of Naaman’s wife, so modest and yet outspoken—instrumental in saving her master’s body and her master’s

soul. Might she not remind you of the Wallflower of the spring? Will you (older boys and girls) try your hand at this exercise, and send me a list of Bible names linked with the flowers that you think may be suggested by their characters?

And above all delight yourselves in Him Whose name is Jesus,—and over against Whose dear name you put the ‘Rose of Sharon,’ and the ‘Lily of the Valley,’ not a lily that grows far up the mountain, difficult to climb, but down where any child can reach it, and enjoy it—the ‘lily of the *valley*.’

But I must hasten to close, by adding as one reason more why children are like flowers,—that their bodies soon wither and die.

Hence the many, many little graves in the cemetery. But the cemetery is God’s garden, where many seeds are sown, and, like the flowers, will come up again, will rise again in glory ‘when Jesus comes.’ I sat the other night by the death-bed of a young believer. I sat with my heart and my eyes full; for Jesus was giving to that dying one some of the foretastes of heaven. ‘Jesus only,’ were the words he loved to come over. It was like the singing of sweet birds, on the graver side of the river of death. The angels seemed to be throwing over the wall to him some of the flowers of Paradise.

‘My Beloved’ (says the Church in the Song of Solomon, vi. 2, 3)—‘My Beloved is gone down into His garden to gather lilies.’

‘Who has stolen my favourite flower? Who dared to touch it?’ cried the gardener one morning, as he entered the greenhouse. As he came out in his rage, he met the black butler, to whom he repeated the angry question, ‘Who dared to touch my favourite flower?’ ‘Oh,’ said the butler, ‘I’ll tell you. This morning, at an early hour, our master sent me to bring him that very flower, and he is wearing it on his breast.’ Then the gardener was silent. The whole garden was the master’s, and might he not do what he liked with his own? So when the black butler Death comes into our domestic garden, to take away our freshest and fairest, our sweetest, our best, what is it but ‘another Lily gathered’ from the lower to the upper garden, from the shade to the sunshine.

‘There everlasting spring abides  
And never withering flowers,  
Death, like a narrow stream, divides  
That happy land from ours.’

‘Come, children, march to Immanuel’s ground,  
For soon we’ll hear the trumpet sound,  
And then we shall with Jesus reign,  
And never, never part again.’

## CHAPTER IX.

### Pastoral Work and Home Life.

1848-1862.

GRANGE COTTAGE, NEWINGTON—an unpretending abode, in its quiet garden, walled in from a rather stirring street, and near the church—what memories it recalls to many a one ! memories treasured in the inmost soul, to be exposed to no rude touch of the careless, and unconcerned, and worldly ! How many poverty-stricken souls have entered there and found untold wealth ! how many careworn ones have left, feeling that their burdens had been shared, and that the light from above had been brought to shine upon their path, making duty clearer and difficulty easier !

Those who were uncertain about their relations with God found there in Mr. Robertson a most sympathetic friend, who would spare no pains, and grudge no time, in trying to solve their difficulties, to discover the *mode* of applying to the case the one remedy, in the efficacy of which his faith was unfailing. It was no dry repetition of doctrine, no formal use

of a system, from which the spirit had gone, but a skilful bringing of persons together,—the sinner and the Saviour; the one of whom had been miserably living in ignorance or misunderstanding of the other, and was just wanting the pure story, as the Bible tells it, to dismiss the doubts, and receive, with all freedom, the freely-given salvation.

How promptly would he reply to letters or questions of inquirers, and with what earnest, persevering care would he watch over cases of hopeful concern, supplying suitable counteractives in each case against what might deaden impression, or check full entry into the glorious light!

Mr. Robertson used to tell how his desire to guide seeking souls to the light was stimulated by the memory of his own early experiences.

When groping in darkness, and longing for guidance, though he had the cream of spiritual teaching in his own home, it was not unnatural that he should look to him on whose public ministrations he waited from week to week, to help him out of the maze in which he was, ‘to a place where liberty and room is.’ The shy, shrinking boy would linger behind the rest of the congregation, at the close of the Sabbath morning’s service, and wait the coming footsteps of his minister, earnestly hoping that he might give him an opportunity of opening to him the troubles of his young heart.

When he passed, the boy followed at a little dis-

tance, eagerly watching if he would not even look round, and give him a chance of speaking. The studious pastor, absorbed in the thought of the many, and the food for *them*, little dreamt how a little personal crumb was longed for by this young hungry soul, and did not even notice him.

The impression of the feeling of disappointment left was ever vivid, and accounts for Mr. Robertson's being always on the outlook for such youthful cravings, ready continually to meet them more than half-way, and to help out the longings and questionings; and for his being often found surrounded by groups of children.

Lenient and tender towards all who sought his counsel, he was peculiarly so to the young; rarely criticising, rarely finding fault,—winsome always. While not lacking power to discern blemishes of character, he would, by the gentlest hint, suggest courses of thought and action in the direction most needed, and always in such a way as to make the listener anxious to enter into the possibilities proposed,—leading, drawing, never driving. As the natural result of this, of his fine sense of the sacredness of friendship, and of the respect due to the feelings of every one, people of all classes were eager to unbosom to him what lay nearest their hearts, and to seek counsel on matters spiritual and temporal, which they would carefully conceal from all others.

One could not be long under his roof, without knowing to what an extent this was the case—how in this, that, and the other room, visitors were waiting, seeking a share of his time, on very various errands, and all with equal faith in his sincere cordiality and trustworthiness, and in his willingness to involve himself in whatever care or labour their cases might need. He often put himself to great trouble to help students by securing teaching for them, writing them introductions, and personally recommending them in likely quarters.

If anxious inquirers (and of these many were outside his own denomination) were paying repeated visits, eagerly seeking the truth, and yet carefully testing every step suggested before taking it, he would—in addition to his own instructions—be selecting from book or manuscript, whatever might tend to solve each successive difficulty, and getting some member of the household to transcribe it, without saying why. All in the household knew well that any such service was meant to contribute to the one great end of his ministry ; and it was willingly rendered for his sake.

Among other things that had been repeatedly copied for his use in this way were some verses, entitled ‘The Mistake and its Rectification,’ of which the following is the story. One Sabbath Mr. Robertson had preached two sermons, in which he tried to show the difference between man’s way of seeking to save himself, and God’s gospel way, the text being, ‘ My

thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.' Next day, the manuscript above mentioned was sent in, anonymously. He was struck with its truth and beauty, and, convinced that it was well fitted to do good, he frequently made use of it. He had never seen or used it but in MS. It had, however, afterwards been printed, and widely circulated, as one of the series of 'Stirling Tracts.' The authorship of it was not known for about five years.

In a bookseller's shop, Mr. Robertson met a friend, whom he noticed to be eagerly looking at this 'Stirling Traet.' Surprised to see it in print, he asked him: 'Is *that* new to you? Did I never give you a copy of it?'

'It is new to me in *this* form,' replied the other. 'You never gave me a copy, but I sent you one.'

This friend—the Rev. James Proctor, who died soon after—was much touched on hearing how useful his lines had been to many; and agreed, at Mr. Robertson's request, to write other verses, suitable for those asking what they 'must do to be saved.' These were published, along with the former, by 'the Book Society,' under the title, 'Man's Way and God's Way.'

What a ministry it was for anxious inquirers all through, was testified by the weekly opportunities announced for conversation on spiritual things, not only in the vestry, at the close of each service, but also at his own house.

It will thus be seen that with the two services his Sabbath work only began. With the gleanings to be gathered, in these conversations, of the day's teaching, and the sick to be visited, besides Sabbath-school exercises, it was often matter of wonder how his not-too-strong frame sustained the strain of prolonged and intensely engrossing work, without what others would deem necessary intermission and support. But the extent to which he was revived and encouraged, by evident tokens of blessing on his labours, was a literal fulfilment of Christ's own words: 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.' As a ministerial friend already quoted said after his death, 'I do not know any one who might with less presumption appropriate this language of the Master.'

Often did he reach home on Sabbath, long after the public services were over—worn out in body, but gladdened and strengthened in spirit, and utterly oblivious of the need of 'the meat that perisheth.' A long evening was often spent, after all this, in conversation with those who had come to the house seeking him, and who were still dealt with individually, and with such patience as each needed; neither weariness nor anything else being allowed to interfere with the sacred work.

Thus had he ever-growing experience in dealing with various minds, which suggested to him fresh ways of putting 'the old, old story,' so as to arrest those

(not a few) to whom it had become ‘as a tale that had been told,’ or those others who had never heard the tale before, except, perhaps, in some perverted and unscriptural form—as a gospel that was yet no gospel to a needy and helpless sinner.

It was sometimes no small cause of gladness to members of his household (either perhaps from a somewhat selfish point of view, or from consideration for him) when occasionally these calls from without, on Sabbath evenings, were fewer than usual, and when he felt at leisure to sit with them, talking, in his natural, genial way, of the things that lay *always* nearest his heart, or answering questions and solving difficulties, whilst rebuking no one’s ignorance and hurting no one’s feelings.

An old fellow-student, already mentioned, says:—

‘Of all the ministers with whom I have been acquainted, and whom I have had the opportunity of particularly observing, I regard Mr. Robertson as the most successful in winning souls. Only “the day shall declare it.” Doubtless he shall then have not a few for “a crown of rejoicing.” From an early period of his ministry in Musselburgh, he set apart an evening every week to meet with those who were anxious about their spiritual interests. This was continued in Edinburgh, alike in his years of struggle and of success. Of this conference many, first and last, availed themselves, and found that God there met with them and dispelled their darkness.

‘His was the “still small voice,” whose appeal is to conscience and affection ; and this speaks most powerfully, and

is best heard in “the secret chamber.” Seclusion is its field of action. There, teacher and taught are brought most heart to heart, and the whole personality of the one acts with fullest force on the whole personality of the other.’

This openness to personal dealing yielded rich fruit in the experience and life of one—

‘A man of science and high talent, who, like all thoughtful men, had often deeply pondered the great problems which hang like a cloud over human life. Especially had he thought and read much about the great questions of sin, of man’s acceptance with God, of the possibility of atonement, and of the restoration of the Divine image in error-stricken humanity, and had long been seeking some rock on which to find sure footing, instead of the various bases he had been trying, only to find them shifting sand.’ He was led to attend Mr. Robertson’s ministry occasionally, owing to the distance of his residence from his own usual place of worship—belonging to another communion.

‘His state of mind had been intensified by the birth of his first child. The first gush of a parental love, that never afterwards ceased to flow out in a bountiful stream, had thrown new light on the tender relationship of the Divine Father to His children, the loving-kindness with which He regards them, and the mercies He bestows. This, and a sense of our pitiable condition while we live apart from it all, made him listen with deep interest to such ministrations as he now received, for they touched a chord that vibrated in sympathy with the preacher’s words, and which drew him to frequent them more and more habitually.

‘The thought, moreover, that on his relations to God

depended, not only the future of his own soul, but the spiritual welfare of his beloved wife and infant child, added to his concern.

‘ He took advantage of Mr. Robertson’s simple arrangement for conversation, to become personally acquainted with him, and to unburden to him his whole mind, and especially to talk over with him a series of discourses Mr. Robertson was then delivering on Isaiah liii. While listening to them he had got a new view of sin, of the Divine Sin-bearer, and of the need that the sinner should concur with the plan for his deliverance. Docile and meek as a little child, he sought to learn more perfectly his lesson in the school of Christ, and the “ambassador for Christ,” faithful to his commission, continued to declare Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as the way of access to God, as a propitiation freely made, and given for the remission of sin, till at last, one evening, as the simple statement was being repeated, bright light broke out, where only the faint streaks of dawn had hitherto appeared.

‘ “Eternal love was seen to be wedded to eternal law.”

‘ “Merey and truth met together ; righteousness and peace kissed each other.” “I see it,” he said, “I see it clearly ;” quickly adding, “How I wish that my M—— had been with me !”

‘ Tears of joy were followed by prayers of gratitude.

‘ His devotedly-attached wife accompanied him on his next visit, when the conversation was renewed with increasing interest and increasing light. Prepared, by many an earnest talk with her husband, for the reception of the truth which had brought light into his mind, she had fewer obstacles to oppose to it ; and henceforth husband and wife walked hand in hand as declared servants of Christ.

‘ Fresh energy and new motives had entered into their lives, and their obedience, made no longer a ground of merit, came to be in the glad and willing spirit of those who, having received much, love much, and therefore long to serve much.

‘ As Mr. Robertson said of him, “ The channel of his gratitude was deepened in proportion as he clearly saw that nothing now needs to flow in the channel of expiation.”

‘ The friendship begun under such solemn and interesting circumstances continued unbroken and undimmed, with constant interchange of service, till death.

‘ During its course the remark was made to a relative, “ If I did not value James Robertson as my own pastor, I could not help doing so for the sake of my children.”

‘ He often urged Mr. Robertson to continue his practice of reserving the Sabbath evening for conversation with inquirers, or others, and *never to omit the announcing of it*, as he said : “ You don’t know how many may be, as I was, anxious to have the advantage of individual dealing with them about their hope for eternity.” ’

During his own holiday time Mr. Robertson wrote to a young man who had been seeking his counsel :—

‘ My dear Friend,—It has been matter of much regret to me that I have been so frequently prevented from meeting your wish for converse on the great things of the great salvation. . . . Anything whatever is a blessing that draws or drives us to Jesus. The way to God, by Him, is so exactly suited to a poor lost soul—so suited to you and me—a way sprinkled with atoning blood—justice and mercy forming such a wall of defence on either side ; and then

the way leads to such a rich Treasure House, filled with all blessings for time and for eternity.

‘Is there not inexpressible sweetness in the thought that salvation is *not* of works, that our full and complete acceptance is not in our wretched selves? It is all, all of grace. It is Christ first, Christ last, Christ all through. The spot wet with His blood is the only spot in the universe where God and the guilty can meet; but to every one who hears its voice, that blood does *speak* of God satisfied, and satisfied by being abundantly glorified. It tells that Christ’s life was given for our life, and that we are warranted and welcomed to carry our failures and misdoings, all our evil within and fears without, all, all, at once to Him. It is our mighty privilege to open our hearts to Him just as they are, with all their deadness, coldness, blackness—keeping nothing back, telling Him all. I hope your *choicest* seat is at the foot of His cross. I know no other Refuge—I need no other, and I know no way of entering or re-entering that Refuge, but trust. Let us never distrust the act of simple trust—trust in Him who “cannot lie.”

‘But I do not well know how to speak to your ease till you let me understand what troubles you, and what stumbles you. . . .’

It may be remarked here that Mr. Robertson used to lament the influence of the holiday season on people generally, through the use they made of it; and was specially anxious to guard his own flock against its temptations. He felt as if people did not always return in autumn, with the same wholesomeness of spirit with which they left home; that, in their

various places of sojourn, they sometimes cast themselves loose from their usual restraints, doing things they would not do at home, and bringing back influences of carelessness, that had a tendency to reduce the atmosphere in and around them. It was not therefore without anxiety and warning that he parted with his people on such occasions.

Another holiday letter to a young friend, for whose interests he was caring:—

‘25th Aug. 1855.

‘We must not lose sight or sound of each other. . . . Two days I was over in Arran. . . . That island is quite a picture gallery of natural beauties, and some precious lessons were suggested on better things. One was in connection with that sentiment of the 36th Psalm: “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains. Thy judgments are a great deep.” If our Father’s dealings with us are an immense Ocean, whose depths we have no power of sounding, on each side of that abyss rise towering mountains—those giants of the earth, with their summits glowing in sunlight.

‘The *Goatfalls* and their kindred are emblems of the “Righteousness of God”—that righteousness within whose embrace all His dealings rest, even as the waters do within the circle of the everlasting hills. We are to prepare ourselves for going down into the “great deep” of God’s “judgments,” by planting our feet more firmly on the “great mountains” of God’s righteousness. Let us dwell more on what God *is*, and then we shall not be greatly moved by anything that God *does*. Never can we go adrift

so far from land, on the dark waters of Providence, as not to have discernible, by faith, some peak of those “Hills whence cometh our help.” When we take our stand on the gospel character of God, and regard it as immovably girding round the whole economy of Providence, then we can afford to cast our eye over the vast heaving ocean of human events. Its tossings and ebbings need occasion us no agonizing solicitude. For however much the waves may be agitated and roaring, they cannot pass the bounds our God has appointed. We may feel the solidity of the rock on which we rest, the revealed wisdom and love of God in Christ, and we *know* that this is the same alike in the sunshine and in the storm.

‘Erroneous views of the Divine character evidently lie at the root of our German friend’s case. I had a long talk with him in his lodgings that evening after you left. When I went in he was alone, and reading one of the capital tracts you had enclosed in your envelope. We started with it, but it was not long before I drew out a distinct avowal of his Socinian creed, the denial of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the divinity of Jesus; and the venomous egg from which all his other errors are hatched is his false estimate of sin. Of course he feels that he has the best reason for making light of sin, that he may give a mere creature Saviour the less to do. We were interrupted by a gentleman coming in just when we were at the most interesting point; but, of his own accord, he came down to — next day seeking me. Unfortunately I was out, and to be away for some hours, but — had some conversation, which confirms my impression that he still needs to be *awakened to know himself*. I hope to find some time when we return

to —— to resume our inquiry. . . . You will wield the sword of “All prayer.” “There is none like unto it.” It is bathed in heaven. May the glorious power of Christ rest upon you, that from the treasures of a heart enriched by His love an influence for good may flow forth on all around you. . . . “Oh for a closer walk,” that our whole life may be one Emmaus journey—happy in the converse of our risen, living, loving Lord. Will you continue to pray this for me, as I will try to do for you? Let me have the happiness of hearing soon of all “the way by which the Lord has led you” since we parted.’

Mr. Robertson’s Fridays and Saturdays were always a time of close seclusion and hard, unremitting labour, with study door locked, and orders given to the servant not to allow him to be disturbed, unless for some reason of serious urgency. When he joined the family circle for a hurried meal, he came with pencil and paper, to catch each passing thought, and with his mind full of his subject—throwing out suggestive hints of what he was gathering for his people, and feeding on richly and joyfully himself; then, having given enough to rouse a current of devout thought, he would be off—with a loving leave-taking—to his cherished work again. The days of study were often prolonged far into the night, and the children would hear his study door open after daybreak, on Sabbath morning, for a short period of rest, to be followed generally by return to work at an early hour. Often, through the quiet hours of night, his voice would be

heard singing in his happy toil—the breaking forth of a joyous soul which could not be repressed.

One of his domestic servants has precious memories of the time spent in his house. On one occasion, when sitting up with some of the children who were ill, she heard sounds coming from his study. Thinking there might be something wrong, she went to the study door, and she heard Mr. Robertson saying: ‘O Lord, the *whole* congregation—may not one of them be awanting.’ In the still hours of the night, while she was watching the children he was pleading for the souls of his people.

Many young people at school in Edinburgh, and away from home, spent good part of their Saturday holiday at Grange Cottage—or, in later years, at 6 Salisbury Road; and however pressed with his pulpit preparation, Mr. Robertson usually found time for kindly interest and inquiries, and sought to make his house feel as homelike as possible for them, being heartily aided in this by those around him.

*Their* souls were to be watched for too. Increasing relish for things spiritual was marked with much joy, and fed. Worldly surroundings and influences elsewhere, and any evidence of yielding to them, were mourned over, and counter-attractions and influences were offered.

There would be the ‘good-night’ in the study, or elsewhere, before leaving, with the parting ‘text,’ and

a few words about it, that felt as if they came straight from the 'Lord of the Hill' Himself, in this interpreter's house; and then the few words of appropriate prayer responsive to the text—uttered just as they were, standing or sitting; and the young stranger, among strangers, would go away fortified—determined, by grace, to lead a better life, confirmed in every better feeling and resolution by the human hand that came so near, and that helped to get a closer grasp of the Divine Hand, which so often in youthful struggles and searchings seems—only *seems*—so far away.

Dr. Joseph Brown says:—

'In the early part of his ministry, there were few preachers by whom the wants of the children were considered in "the daily ministration." Things are greatly mended now, and Mr. Robertson did much to mend them. He set himself, in the exercise of a holy ingenuity, to devise means for arresting and rewarding the attention of the young; and there are many young men and maidens, ay, and many fathers and mothers, in different parts of the country, who will testify that he was the first minister who interested, instructed, and impressed them. Many of our ministers—I hope most of them—recognise, in some form or other, the claims of the young; but Mr. Robertson was before them; and as he was before them in point of time, so was he before them in point of efficiency. He stood confessed to the end as the prince of preachers to children.'

We quote an extract from an appreciative tribute by the Rev. J. D. Taylor, Kilwinning, son of an esteemed elder in Mr. Robertson's congregation:—

‘He interwove “Children’s Portions” with his ordinary discourses, long before the days of special services for the young. He had an almost unequalled felicity in making divine truth attractive to the young, his addresses to them being rich in running illustrations, and exuberant with fancy, abounding in those soft and silken cords of image and allegory, which little hands ever grasp with delight. I can well recall the first time I ever heard him, now nearly a quarter of a century ago, when he preached a Sabbath evening sermon to children from the text: “Behold I stand at the door and knock.” I have never forgotten with what graphic and impressive power he described those bolts and bars, by which so many keep the loving Saviour out of their hearts.

‘By putting two texts together, as he often did, he got what he called a stereoscopic view of truth.’

Some very interesting reminiscences, of which we have gladly availed ourselves in some of the following pages, have been kindly given by Mr. James Goodfellow, the much-respected Home Missionary of the congregation, who had many opportunities of accompanying, and specially observing Mr. Robertson in his work. He says:—

‘ Preaching in Duncan Street Church once from the text, “They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine,” Mr.

Robertson asked the children if ever they had seen a vine. Then he invited any of them who had not to come over to his house on the morrow, and he would show them one. On Monday morning the bell rang, and a crowd of children were at the door—they had come to see the vine. Mr. Robertson took them in his own happy way and showed them it, and preached a little sermon to them, taking their faith in *his* word as an illustration of the way in which they were to trust *Christ's* word. The children went away; but in a little while another group came, and they too had their wish gratified, and were pointed to the True Vine. That Monday's sermon to the young proved a memorable one to some of them.'

On another occasion he at once secured the attention of a large audience of children and teachers by the following introduction:—

‘As I was coming along in the train yesterday there were three men in the carriage beside me. I knew one of them to be a farmer from his appearance and conversation; I knew the second to be a miller in the same way; and the third I knew to be a fisher, from the line and hooks that were wound round his hat. I have come to you to-day as a fisher, and when I throw out my gospel line, do not be afraid to lay hold on the beautiful hook (my text), for I come, not to injure you, but to draw you out of the muddy stream of sin into the pure water of life;’ and so he cast his line in his own inimitable way.

During those Duncan Street days a happy band of little ones was gathering round Mr. Robertson’s own

table. We have a glimpse of them in the following letter to a sister :—

‘ . . . Mamma is at present down-stairs in the midst of her wee lassies. You would know them getting bigger and wiser. . . .

‘ If you were here you would see Mary put her spoon into the sugar, and, taking a great mouthful, say to her mother, “ Will you forgive me this time yet, mamma ? ” Something had fallen which Mary did not much care to lift when “ Mamma ” was bidding her do it. “ O mamma,” she says, “ I think it *won’t* lift. It’s surely sticking to the ground.”

‘ Her mamma was telling her the other day what a wicked world this was, and the happy home heaven would be, when she replied in her quick way, “ Why do you stay here then ? Let us go home to heaven—just let us go to-day ! ” The dear lassies, they are brimful of life and happiness. . . . ’

‘ Mr. Robertson ’ (says Mr. Young) ‘ was a great favourite with the young people of the congregation, and in the households where he was wont to visit. He delighted in their company, and was very successful in drawing them out to talk with him, and in interesting them by his own conversation. Our children’s soirees and Sabbath - school excursions he enjoyed quite as much as any of the children, giving pleasure to all around, while he received from them an abundant measure of it for himself. His fund of anecdote and illustration seemed inexhaustible, and he poured out “ things new and old,” in lavish profusion, for his eager young listeners. Riddles and conundrums were in great favour with him, and he had a plentiful stock of

them, so that he could keep a merry band beside him, in alternating puzzle and laughter, with his guesses, and enigmas, and strange plays upon words. He used to say he studied best on the Saturday evening if there was a gathering of young people at his house, and he could hear, in his study, the echo of gladsome song and merry play from the drawing-room. Certainly, on such occasions, his youthful visitors were in no doubt as to his desire for their full enjoyment of the evening's happy diversions, and gladly welcomed his participation in their pleasure, if for a few minutes he was drawn from his study to join the company.

'Many a boy or girl has left his presence, pondering over some quaint question put by him, or some puzzling enigma ; and I have seen children run up to him in the street, to tell him the answer to some conundrum he had dropped, on his last visitation to their home. In this way he made many an opportunity for instilling a wholesome lesson, or awakening a serious thought, and he was skilled in using such opportunities to good purpose.'

Another friend tells how, one day in Glasgow, a little hand was felt gently pulling his coat from behind, and how, on his turning round, a little voice timidly said : 'Please, sir, the clock has ticked —— times since I was born' —mentioning the number.

A friend above quoted says :—

'His household visits were like gleams of sunshine ; in the home he was the children's friend. Visiting a family of his flock one day, he was at once surrounded by the children.

He took one of them, a little boy, upon his knee, and asked him what he was going to be when he grew up. Then he asked him what his brother James was going to be. The boy answered, "Oh ! I think James wants to be nothing." "Well," said Mr. Robertson, "let us all be like James, nothing. 'Oh to be nothing, nothing,'—emptied of self and full of Christ." His words are still fresh on the boy's memory. Calling on another occasion, and finding that the father was ill and in bed, he sent this message to him by one of the children, and, in order to fix it on the child's memory, he gave a word for each finger: "All . is . yours . but . yourself." Adding to the boy, "Remember ! all the fingers his but the thumb."

He gave the same thought as a puzzle to other two young people, who remember it with much interest. He was driving with them a short distance after a meeting of the last Synod he attended, when he said before parting: 'Now, children, I am going to give you a riddle to find out for me. All things belong to you except one thing; what is that ?' They thought over it for some days, and then found that they had hit on the right answer: 'All things are yours . . . and *ye* are Christ's' (1 Cor. iii. 21, 23).

As he was passing along one day with some flowers in his hand, a message-boy asked him for one for his jacket. Mr. Robertson gave him one, and the boy put it in his button-hole. Mr. Robertson said: 'Now I have another flower for your heart: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Have you got hold of it ? Can you

repeat it ?' The boy repeated it. 'Well,' said Mr. Robertson, 'put it in your heart ; you put the other in your jacket.' The boy looked puzzled, and said, 'How do I do it ?' Mr. Robertson said, 'You *pray* it. You ask God to do it. Do you think you need a clean heart ?' The boy said, 'Yes.' 'Do you desire a clean heart ?' 'Yes.' 'You want all the sin washed out of it ?' 'Yes.' 'Then just ask Jesus to do it. Do not carry your sinful heart any longer. He wants it now to make it clean.'

'I did not give you a withered flower. So you must not keep your heart until it is all withered and hardened by sin, and then take it to Jesus. . . . Have you put the flower in your heart now ?' The boy answered, 'I think so,' and went away looking at the flower in his button-hole and then back at Mr. Robertson as long as he could see him.

Speaking to his Bible-class on one occasion on the subtle temptations of Satan, he said, 'He is bad every way you take him—his very name, for instance. Take away the d and he is evil, transpose the e and he is vile, take away e and v and he is il—an il, vile, evil devil !'

It was natural that Mr. Robertson in his love for children should love also to speak of them. He would often draw a friend aside from the busy street, if only for a moment, to tell some story about their touching words and childlike ways. One of these friends gives us an anecdote such as he delighted to relate. 'A

little friend had been making a round of visits along with her mother. Several ladies upon whom they called were not at home. Talking of this afterwards, the child said: "Mamma, is God ever out?" "No, dear; why do you ask?" "Oh, I thought that with all the angels and people in heaven to look after, God *must* sometimes be from home."

Next to the children the mothers had a warm and sympathetic place in Mr. Robertson's heart.

At a Conference held in Moffat, not very long before his death, those who saw and heard him (we are told) can never forget the light that shone in his face, and the wonderful spirituality that breathed in all his utterances. In addressing the children, he told them of two boys who were talking together about the *Pilgrim's Progress*. The one said to the other that he liked Christian very much. The other said that he liked Christiana better, for while Christian went alone, Christiana took all her children with her. Then, looking down upon the mothers who were present, Mr. Robertson said, 'The Lord bless you, Christianas!'

Visiting a home once in which there were a number of children, he found the mother careworn and weary. His remark was: 'What a number of errands you will be having to the Throne!' The friend who tells this adds that the saying has been often repeated by her to anxious mothers since.

## CHAPTER X.

### Cloud and Sunshine.

1855—

THOUGH Mr. Robertson had gathered a new and loving home circle round himself, there was no change or loosening in his clinging to his old home. He wrote to a sister:—

‘ . . . Do you really look for me on Tuesday next? I wish I could, but must content myself with a mental trip, an aerial ramble. I am many, many a time beside you in spirit. Greenhill will always be home to my heart. But “far better” still will it be when we bid every such home a final adieu, and close our eyes on earth for ever, to find our home with Him who says, “I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you to Myself.” . . .

‘ . . . I never have time to write a letter except in the most hurried manner at this season of the year [Nov.]. It is well for us to remember that we are *not our own*. If we are disposed to forget it, the Lord keeps us in mind of it. What nests we would build to ourselves if we were left to our own

disposal! But there is a gentle, guiding, holy, loving Eye upon us when we know it not. My dear sister, what has not sovereign grace done for us!'

Again to the same:—

' . . . You surely hold me to be a privileged man, in respect of correspondence, else you might well disown me. Thanks for yours, which relieved us of all our fears that William had broken his leg or his head somewhere near *Cowlairs*! [referring to a recent railway accident].

' Did you ever meet any of the L.'s of F. when you were here? I spent a day or two with them lately, and I never saw a family so like our own Greenhill one. The coincidences would divert you when I have time to tell you of them. . . The very candlesticks at which the girls sew beside their mother in the winter evenings seem duplicates of yours. And their eldest brother comes in about 8 o'clock, throws himself back in the arm-chair, and reads them the newspapers and the magazines! Then the house, the rooms, the piano, the very gig that takes them to church, the calm presiding wisdom of their mother, are almost *fac-similes*. But she is a widow, and they are fatherless! Blessed be God that *we* are yet permitted to look up in the faces of the dear guides of our youth.'

Towards the close of 1855 (7th December), death, however, again entered the Greenhill circle, and removed the loved and gentle mother. The days being evidently at hand when she must die, Mr. Robertson wrote to the watchers at home:—

‘ Nov. 30, 1855.

‘ My very dear Sisters,—I am trying to work away at sermons for Sabbath, but you can believe that my heart is most with you. I wish the subjects that have come in course had been more in harmony with my feelings. I should have liked to preach *to myself*, from some such words as these: “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? . . . Father, glorify Thy name;” or, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.” *He* recognised what befell Him as the appointment of a Father’s will, and dealt out to Him by a Father’s hand; *therefore* did he cheerfully submit to God’s will, and glorify God’s name by such endurance.

‘ Yes, it is a Father’s will, who knows our frame, who knows also, and has appointed everything that is occurring to us, and is not this blessed remembrance the sweetest balm to our spirits? *Love* comes to our relief. The cup is bitter, but we love Him who administers it, and love takes the bitterness away. Our Father’s will occasions no pain in heaven. It cannot, then, occasion needless pain on earth; for it is the will of the same God. Blessed be His name for the consolation! Without it, what should we be? With it, all is easy. Resignation almost ceases to be an effort. It becomes as “meat” and “drink” to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things.

‘ May you and I enter more into fellowship with Jesus in saying, “I delight to do Thy will!” What depths of untold sorrow the doing of that will led *Him* into;— yet He delighted in it, whilst His human heart

felt the sorrow in all its anguish. I think on Gambold's words :—

“ ‘Who can help praying now?  
My soul is on the stretch, and busy with his God,  
About some big request I cannot utter.’ ”

‘ But He knows all the meaning of these “unutterable groanings,” which impotent sympathy wrings from the burdened heart. Let us not “fear as we enter into the cloud.” In that cloud we shall see His glory.

‘ I write these hurried lines, that, in your hearts and my own, the spirit of praise may be stirred up amid our heaviness, and that we may “follow on,” as David did, to make “the shadow of His wings our refuge, till these calamities be overpast.”

‘ You will be dropping little gospel texts into our beloved mother’s ear. May the joy of the Lord strengthen her in the hour of nature’s weakness. . . . Our separation, in presence only, draws us nearer in heart; and the want of opportunity of speaking *to* each other will lead us the oftener to speak *of* each other to Him who heareth prayer. Commending you, with warmest affection, to the unquenchable love and faithfulness of the Friend who loveth at all times, but in adversity becometh a “Brother,”—I am, your ever attached brother,

JAMES.’

Another stroke followed soon after, about which he thus writes :—

‘ Feb. 16, 1856.

‘ “Our Beloved is come down into His garden to gather lilies.” And this morning He has gathered home our beautiful, bounding boy, Alexander. Dear precious lamb!

he has “come out of *great* tribulation.” There was sore suffering for the last two days. It had its origin in teething, and in some sympathetic affection of the head. Our inmost hearts are bleeding. In this first freshness of our sorrow, we sometimes feel almost as if there were no stepping-stones, on which to pass through these deep waters. Our God lets us feel that we are beyond our depth, just that His own hand may be our *only stay*. . . . Our darling was one of the very sweetest cords of love let down from heaven to fasten round our hearts, and draw them up with him where he is gone. Where can we *rest* but where Jesus *reigns*! Every pulsation of the bereaved heart echoes the cry, “How long?”

‘In spite of all the agony the dear child passed through, his exquisite placidity and sweetness of disposition remain on the countenance.

‘In the blessed hope of the restoration of the treasure, we intend to lay the beautiful wee body in its narrow bed on Wednesday. . . .’

What was to Mr. Robertson another *true* bereavement occurred not long after this, in the interruption, by death, of a friendship that ran its earthly course in a few years of highly-prized fellowship,—a fellowship which had its root in closest spiritual sympathy, and influenced the personal and ministerial life of both.

Both as to the inmost circle of intimacy, and the Church at large, it was a loss such as Mr. Robertson mourned with no light grief. Fellow-soldiers, who were truly fighting the battles of the Lord, could ill

be spared, when all, and more than all, seemed to be needed.

We refer to the Rev. John Maclaren, who, during a few years' ministry in Glasgow, had been doing a fundamental work of no common kind, under the great Master Builder, and of whose short but powerful and fruitful life an interesting record was written, at the time of his death.<sup>1</sup>

From Mr. Robertson's letters to Mr. Maclaren, we extract the following:—

‘ Aug. 1853.

‘ . . . There is something surpassingly sweet in the thought that, through wondrous grace, we hope to be together evermore. Let us seek to have more realizing views of heaven every day—that it is near—and that it is ours through Jesus. Oh that our souls were full of Him,—our ministry, our life, our all unreservedly His. I am more and more convinced that we can only speed well as ministers in the exact degree in which we prosper in our own souls, as close walkers with God.

‘ Your present perplexities are much on our hearts. The “Good Spirit” Himself be your guide. May our Father help us to view His hand in the smallest circumstances of every case. You know these lines? I have often felt them very cheering—

‘ “With peaceful mind thy course of duty run,  
God nothing does, nor suffers to be done,  
But what thou would’st thyself, if thou could’st see  
Through all events of things as well as He.”’

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<sup>1</sup> *Memoir of the Rev. John Maclaren*, by the Rev. Peter Leys, Strathaven.

Mr. Maclaren had declined several calls to settled and prosperous churches, in order that he might devote himself to the labour of gathering in a congregation from among the poor people of the Cowcaddens in Glasgow, where he began his work in a humble mechanics' hall. Mr. Robertson wrote to him at this time as follows :—

‘16th Sept. 1853.

‘. . . I read your decision this morning with deepest interest. I enter into the very joy of your relief at the throne of grace, and give thanks with you, and for you ; and with my very soul, dear brother, I commend you and your work into the tender hands and holy keeping of our gracious Father, who has guided, overruled, appointed all. You go to till the wilderness for One who never suffered any true labourer to lose in any way. “God speed the plough” of His precious gospel, which shall turn even the wilderness into a “fruitful field.” “My word shall prosper.” Is not this warrant, sure warrant for hopeful, expecting prayer, without hesitation, mistrust, or misgiving of any sort ? “Be strong, yea, be strong.” . . . In the fulness of the blessing of the gospel may God send you forth. . . .’

Writing shortly before Mr. Maclaren’s death, he says :—

‘Newington, 3rd June 1859.

‘My heart is ever with you, and cannot cease to commend you to “our Father, who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace ;” and what a goodly heritage these define ! From whose heart could it come but our Father’s ? and what a position

of safety, and joy, and hope is theirs, who know whom they are trusting! “His work is perfect.” His doings in grace are so, and His doings in providence no less so. His way is in the sea; but His way is also in the sanctuary, where the rent veil discloses the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat. Whatever may be in your cup, there is new covenant love at the bottom of it. How reposeful and blissful a state when the soul is brought to this: “Thou shalt guide me.” I know not what lies before me. My path may be dark and perplexing; steep hills may be in it, and slippery descents, but “*Thou Lord shalt guide me.*” I have put my hand in Thine, the very Hand that was nailed to the cross for me, and who shall be able to pluck me out of it? “Thou shalt guide me,” and “*afterward*”—it may be after some more discoveries of my own nothingness,—no matter—if, “*afterward Thou shalt receive me to glory.*”

‘I have often remembered the night when you and I first read the case of the man who said:—

“‘I’m a poor sinner and nothing at all,  
But Jesus Christ is my all in all.’”

‘It came vividly before me the other evening, when a simple-hearted old disciple said to me, “I do not know what is to come out of this illness of mine. But it does not matter; for Jesus has taken the whole concern into His own hand, and I’ve given my cordial consent to that—*my cordial consent*—and His word was never broken yet—*never yet!*”

‘Many are the praying hearts, my beloved friend, that are constantly commanding you to the Shepherd of the sheep, whose eye is bent upon you night and day. Blessed Jesus! we shall see Him soon. The King in His beauty. You will see the thorn marks in His brow, of which you spoke

when you last assisted here. Present troubles and conflicts will be as a shadow that has passed away, and, in the meantime, you will lose the sense of these, in the abundance of *His* strong consolation.

‘May you and your dear mother and wife be cheered, moment by moment, as by sunshine from the face of God.’

Mr. Robertson wrote to the late Mr. John Colville, a man of truly Nathanael-like spirit, who had been taking a brother’s place in the sick chamber:—

‘Newington, 10th June 1859.

‘. . . My heart is ever with you, as you watch the ebbing earthly life of one so dear. Over his real life in Jesus death has no power at all. He has nothing to do with death but to triumph over it. You will be realizing heaven as very near, with its peace, its rest, its love, its joy. We are meeting you in spirit at the throne, while committing our beloved brother to the faithful, tender, watchful Shepherd, who Himself comes to earth’s dark shore, to carry him across, to carry him home.

‘Our gracious covenant-God will strengthen and console his dear wife and mother. They will expect the help they need, when natural feelings are working mightily within them, and these are not wrong, for “Jesus wept.” . . .’

‘16th June 1859.

‘. . . “It is I, be not afraid.” Jesus deemed it sufficient to put all fear to flight, to let them know that *He was there*. Is not that voice of our Beloved very sweet to you, as He walks with you now on the waters? It is the same voice that cried of old in the ears of Israel, “I, even I, am He.”

We have been bearing on our hearts in the congregation, and in our meetings, our precious friend, who is awaiting the hour of his departure. For the exceeding strength and comfort of God's rich grace granted him, many thanksgivings were offered. The dying day is one of those for which his strength is "accordingly" ensured. His Forerunner will be in sight. He will set his foot only in the warm prints of the feet of Jesus. He will "see Jesus standing on the right hand of God." You cannot too tenderly remember us to him, with a heart full of affection, and the earnest desire that "an entrance may be ministered to him abundantly." . . .

' . . . There is an atmosphere of special blessing in the school of trial;—to use the words of a Christian friend: "It is a finishing school." *Jesus* was perfect through suffering, and so shall we! The means may be costly, but they are well worth the pains.

' . . . That same boundless love which led our blessed Lord to Calvary, leads Him still to carry us, with all our cares, in His bosom. In the openings of our hearts to Him, and the opening of His heart to us, in giving us answers of peace, quieting our anxieties in all the emergencies of life—in that lie some of the highest blessednesses on this side heaven.'

To the same, when the end came:—

‘ 21st June 1859.

‘ “Now he is comforted.”

‘ “Present with the Lord.”

‘ “With me where I am.”

‘ “God has wiped away all tears from his eyes.” And yet *our* eyes overflow. I have wept my fill since your

telegram came, dear brother. And did not He who has taken up to heaven a human heart—our compassionate High Priest — become our fellow - mourner, by weeping for the dead ! Oh that He may apply His own balm to the wounds of sorely-bereaved ones.

‘She that is a “widow indeed ” will be trusting in God, and finding that to be a new text to her, “Thy Maker is thy husband ”—the undying One. And the deeply-smitten mother will be understanding, as she never did before, the heart of Jesus at the gate of Nain. We are praying that the smile of the Saviour may be with you all, and the breathing of the Comforter.

‘Though such precious, precious hopes are withered, the never-failing word remaineth, “*In Me* ye shall have peace.” With overflowing love and sympathy to the sorrowing circle, ever your attached friend,

J. R.’

Again to the same :—

‘Irvine, 19th July 1859.

‘. . . On our way here, we visited our precious friend’s grave ; and close by it, John caught a little bird that had escaped from a cage. It reminded me of Ralph Erskine’s lines :—

‘“Death is to him a sweet repose,  
The bud is ope’d to show the rose,  
The cage is broke to let him fly,  
And build his happy nest on high.”

‘. . . But alas for ourselves ! that the *flower* of the grass soonest withers. How are the *mighty* fallen !’

With reference to him along with one or two others in the coterie of friends, Mrs. Maclaren wrote, after Mr. Robertson’s death, to a member of his family :—

‘How that little circle of Christian brothers loved, and delighted in one another! I cannot think that the intercourse so cherished on earth is ended for ever! No; “We live together with Him,” and shall renew it where the Lamb is the centre.

‘I recollect of saying to Mr. Robertson, that I had never seen that it was best, in any respect, that my dear husband had been taken away, but I knew that it must be so; when he quickly said, “Ah, it wouldn’t be *faith* to you and me, if we could *see*.”

‘The beauty of Mr. Robertson’s Christianity made me feel his most ordinary actions and conversation noteworthy, and all that I ever saw or heard of him greatly interested me, and was pondered over;—but somehow the impressions won’t submit to be transcribed. Long before I saw him, I remember hearing Dr. Heugh speak of him with great admiration and love; and all that I heard of his singular piety, and ardour in winning souls, led me to think of him as less *human* than he really was. But when I met him for the first time, his exquisite human sympathies, elevated and controlled as they were by divine grace, at once struck and won me.

‘I never saw his *adroitness*, in saying suitable things to those who would fain have escaped from them, equalled. No matter how difficult the circumstances might be, his genius would instinctively hit on a most unexpected and thoroughly effective mode of administering the needed instruction, or warning, or reproof, not only without giving offence, but securing the gratitude of the object of his dealing.

‘A medical student told me that Mr. Robertson called upon him at his lodgings, which were up two stairs. There was no opportunity for private conversation, as one or two

fellow-students were present, and my impression is that, although the visit was very pleasant, it was not considered quite satisfactory by Mr. Robertson ; he and the lad would both have preferred being alone together. When he took leave, my young friend accompanied him to the door, and kindly offered his arm to assist him down-stairs. The offer was pleasantly and gratefully declined, with the smiling but significant explanation, "*Facilis descensus*"—"Averni" was of course mentally supplied by the lad, who was much struck by the terrible suggestion so unexpectedly conveyed in a spirit of most loving and fatherly warning, and the clever way in which it was done.

‘ . . . I have recollections which I shall ever cherish of the heavenly atmosphere in which our dear friend lived, of the spiritual impulses he aroused, and of his *wonderful* prayers.’

Another friend furnishes further illustration of the ‘ adroitness’ spoken of.

‘ Meeting a young lady one day, he shook hands, and said, “Do you remember that, when you were a little girl, you strayed, and were lost?” “O yes,” she replied, “I often hear about that, and how eagerly I was sought for, and what a glad home it was when I was found, and brought back.” “Well, you are lost still, if Christ has not found you,” said Mr. Robertson ; “and oh! how earnestly He is seeking you, and what a glad home it will be up yonder when you are found!” The only reply given by the young lady was a silent tear. They shook hands and parted. It was a word in season.’

‘ A student one day said to him, “I am thinking of giving up, Mr. Robertson. I cannot look after my own soul, and

how shall I be able to look after the souls of a whole congregation ? ”

“ “ Where will you go to ? ” immediately asked Mr. Robertson,—“ to Tarshish ? Remember Jonah.”

‘ Returning home late one evening, he entered into conversation with the policeman, who was on duty, and going his round, up Salisbury Road, with his lantern in his hand.

“ “ Well, you are watching, and you have your lamp with you,” said Mr. Robertson.

“ “ Just so, sir,” said the policeman.

“ “ Well,” said Mr. Robertson, “ I am a watchman too, and I carry a light. I watch for souls, and this is my lamp,” —taking out his Bible. “ You turn your light in by my house and garden, as you pass, to see if all is right. I thank you for that ; and in return for your kindness, allow me to turn my light in upon your heart ; ” and Mr. Robertson repeated some texts, and put some plain questions, and left him with this question, which he asked him to think over and over, and try to answer : “ How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ? ”

‘ Meeting a man one day on the street, he inquired after his health. The man said he was afflicted with heart-disease, and could not sleep at night ; “ but,” he added, “ the doctor can do nothing.” “ Ah,” said Mr. Robertson, “ the worst form of heart-disease is sin ; yet people go about with the disease, and they do not know it, and they sleep quite soundly. Now it is my business to tell them how matters stand, and to try to disturb their sleep, for I can point them to a Physician who can heal them, and then they can sleep in peace. Have you been to Christ

with your sins? To be forgiven, to be at peace with God, will help you to sleep, and Christ is willing to give you pardon just now." The man was silent, but went away impressed.'

'When on a visit to Irvine, he was walking along the beach one day, and coming upon some fishermen, who were preparing bait, he entered into conversation with them. He asked them if they "only used shell bait?" They said, "No; they often tried worms; when one bait failed, they tried a change." Mr. Robertson asked if, "every time they baited a hook, they caught a fish?" They said, "No; sometimes a fish got the bait, but was not hooked, and they had to try again." "Ah," said Mr. Robertson, "that's the way Satan does; he often tries a glass of whisky, and if one does not do, he tries a second, and a third. Whisky is his worm, and he catches and ruins many souls with it; but he tries other bait,—like you, he changes his bait. He is a skilled fisher, and we need to be constantly guarding against his hidden hooks. If we take Christ's bait, the gospel, we will not be so easily tempted to look at Satan's."

About this time, the household of Greenhill was again darkened by two bereavements, which followed each other in quick succession. The first, in November 1859, was the death of Robert, the youngest son, a student of great promise and rare accomplishments, who wore himself out before the time; the second, a few months later, that of the eldest son Andrew, whose light shone most unobtrusively, yet really,

over the whole neighbourhood in which his lot was cast. It was his to set his life to music, to

“*Do noble things, not dream them all day long,  
And thus make life, death, and that vast for ever  
One grand sweet song.*”

Avenuehead, where the latter resided, was about a mile from Greenhill. It was described at the time, by one who has already written in these pages, as ‘a quaint old house, embowered in thick shrubbery, curtained off from the loud and glaring world by a green veil of lilac and laurel, through which the light passed in subdued and softened.’

The same writer continues:—

‘For years he had been the victim of cramp spasms, which came upon him at intervals. He knew their deadly power. On the 29th February 1860, the end came. He was sitting in the spring twilight, waiting for tea, when he was seized more violently than he had ever been. He felt that death was on him, and did not object, though he had always done so before, to sending to Greenhill for his friends.

‘The wonted reliefs were of no avail; and ere the hurried summons had brought loving hands to stay his head, he was unconscious of aught on earth, and was calmly passing away to rest, from his lonely pain to the house of his Heavenly Father.’

‘Oh, how dark,’ James wrote, ‘God can make our sky, and how desolate our path! “All Thy waves and billows are gone over me.” But they are *God's* waves, not rolling at random—no, every drop of them measured, and impelled by God's appointment. In no other circumstances could

this removal have taken place, so as to gain the wise and holy ends which God had in view.

‘Over these wrecks of earthly hope, over the dust of the dear departed, our tear-filled eyes are reading, “What I do ye know not now.” Yet we know enough of the character of our redeeming God to lay a firm foundation for cordial acquiescence.

‘Our beloved old father is a model of intelligent, calm, trusting composure. We glorify God in him.

‘Much did dear Andrew do for the good of others in this neighbourhood. . . . The sorrow of the people all around, to whom he had been such a blessing, is the most heart-rending imaginable.

‘Instead of being able to speak, as was their wont when we met by the way, they stand still and weep, almost like children. . . . To-morrow is the sad funeral day. But Jesus comes with the mourners.’

We return from these personal trials to the subject of pastoral work, regarding which Mr. Young says:—

‘I remember very vividly my first evening at Grange Cottage, in the beginning of 1861. Two or three of us newcomers were invited to “an egg,” after the prayer-meeting. Mr. Robertson was alone with us at supper, and read aloud to us, with great gusto, Dr. John Brown’s letter to Dr. Cairns on his father’s life, adding his own reminiscences of Dr. Brown, and of others, whose names occurred in the letter.

‘This was a frequent mode with Mr. Robertson of interesting young men, at the little gatherings which he had in his house. If there were not at the table some returned missionary, or other person who could give us special information, or discuss

a subject so that we might listen to its treatment, he was almost sure to introduce some book he had been reading, and make it the means of indirect teaching and suggestion.

‘Newington was not at that time what is sometimes called “a young men’s church,” and there were no societies for young men, nor a Fellowship Association, until some years afterwards; but Mr. Robertson attracted and kept young men who were interested in Church work, and especially those who were preparing for ministerial or missionary service. His personal influence, and the social intercourse to which he introduced such, were a power for good to many of us, who might otherwise have fallen under the common temptation of “wandering,” or been attracted to churches where hearing was not likely to be followed by personal dealing and engagement in Christian work. He did not himself conduct the young men’s class at this time; but he held an occasional meeting, perhaps two in the year, for young men, on a Sabbath evening. For such occasions, he was wont to engage one of us to write a paper, on a subject of practical or evidential interest, and then follow up the reading of it by some remarks of his own, discursive, rather than studied, but full of apt illustration and practical suggestion.

‘After we started a Literary Society and Fellowship Association, he took great interest in hearing of our proceedings, and was very particular about getting strangers early introduced to us, and made at home in our meetings.

‘His influence over us was rather in the way of *elevation* than of *direction*. He lifted us into a higher region of thought, and a purer atmosphere, rather than met our difficulties by reasoning, or satisfied our doubts by arguments.

‘From my intercourse with fellow-students at the time I

refer to, I would be inclined to say, that if he did not do much to set young men free from the perplexities so incident to mere intellectual discussion of spiritual mysteries and problems, he did a great deal to save some of us from falling into doubt or difficulty, by the intensity and earnestness of his own faith, and the enthusiasm with which he sought to engage us in useful work, and encouraged us in it. His religious conversation with us was singularly free from austerity and unctuousness. It was easy, free, and interesting, with an adroit readiness in sudden personal attack, and an attractive—sometimes fanciful—way of using texts, that struck you by its strangeness, and yet made you think of the words more than you otherwise would have done.'

'A student once told me,' writes the Rev. J. D. Taylor, 'that in conversation Mr. Robertson said to him :—“Suppose a poor heathen lying dying on the ground who has never heard the gospel. He has only five minutes to live; what would you say to him ?” And he took out his watch to count the passing minutes.'

Mr. Taylor also makes the very just remark that, 'while he abhorred idle talking and jesting, his cheery laugh would ring out heartily as some fact was touched on its humorous side.'

Mr. Robertson himself was wont to tell such little incidents as the following with great gusto:—

Being present at a social gathering in Edinburgh for aged people, at the close he conducted a party of frail old 'bodies' to the cab he had in waiting. When all were seated, he asked, 'Are you all ready to start ?' 'A' richt, sir,' replied one, 'an' this is *jist* like the Millennium.'

A friend of Mr. Robertson's had a very cross old gardener. Meeting this man on a fine spring morning, Mr. Robertson said, 'Well, Thomas, this is a lovely day.' Thomas replied, 'I'm girnin' wi' the teethache, and wuss I was in Beelzebub's boosum.'

'Softly, Thomas, it's *Abraham's* bosom.'

'I'm no heedlin' which o' them it is.'

Among the congregational labours alluded to as carried on in the mission district, there was the mothers' meeting, a meeting which may be described as a kind of Evangelical Alliance, for the workers in it were drawn from different sections of the Christian Church. One of these writes:—

'We so vividly recall his racy reading of Power's tract, "Croaking Kate and Chirping Jane," on occasion of the re-opening of this meeting for the season. His beaming face was radiant with fun as he rehearsed the keen humour of the story, saying that he had come across it in his holiday time, and had treasured it up for the mothers.'

'In connection with this mothers' meeting there was a very flourishing penny-bank, almost, we think, the first one in Edinburgh. Sometimes, in the gloamin' of the winter afternoons, a ray of sunshine entered the bare hall as Mr. Robertson's face appeared in the doorway. He always had a word for "the bankers," as we styled the depositors, asking them where they had read of a penny's being given equally to each worker at the end of the day's work; encouraging, it might be, a little one, by telling of the widow's mite; or posing bigger children about Christ's rendering the tribute-money, and its being taken from the mouth of a fish; thus

imprinting the word of God indelibly on the memory of all. To those in charge there was the fitting word as to rendering in *their* perfect account at the Great Day. Very few could forget even a passing word from his lips.'

Mention ought here also to be made of other and larger evening gatherings in Grange Cottage than those already referred to, when friends were brought together for the special purpose of holding conversation on some topic affecting Christian life, or walk, or work, the subject being made known to them beforehand. These were not exactly what is known by the modern term 'Bible-reading,' though after tea Mr. Robertson, with pocket-Bible in hand (he always carried a pocket-Bible), would open and guide the conversation with a few telling hints from his Great Authority. There were friends of outstanding piety and ability often present to aid him in contributing to the profit and enjoyment of the whole ; and among the company there were also some who could contribute nothing—the young and the learning—who were there to listen, and who still look back on these seasons with delight as among their most gladsome privileges.

The religious conversation, while bright and cheerful, was not unduly prolonged ; and opportunity was given afterwards for friendly introductions and easy talk. Such gatherings became great favourites—especially if the pastor was present—and were repeated with enjoyment in the houses of some of the elders also.

## CHAPTER XI.

### Grange Road.

1862-1877.

FULL of charm, because of 'the ministration of the Spirit,' as was the plain, unadorned building in Duncan Street to the church that had gathered there, and sacred as it was to many a memory, because of the new vision there granted, and the glimpses gained of 'the glory that excelleth,' it had become 'too narrow by reason of the inhabitants,' and had to be given up as the place for worship.

Meanwhile both pastor and people had been called to pass through a time of trial in connection with their mission district in 1861. As a result of this and of the feeling evoked by it, a number of large gifts for Duncan Street Church were sent in unsolicited to Mr. Robertson by members of a sister denomination, who were aware of the value of his work, and were in full sympathy with it.

This willing help, combined with an increasing membership and other things, seemed to indicate God's voice in providence, 'Enlarge the place of thy tent.'

With the nucleus of funds referred to, swelled by the contributions of the people themselves, the new building in Grange Road was more than half provided for, ere the foundation-stone was laid on the 23rd of July 1862. It was opened on 15th November 1863 ; and, about four years after entering it, when they met to celebrate the completion of twenty-five years of their beloved pastor's ministry, the remaining provision had been 'most heartily' made, as 'a grateful thankoffering, by the united and attached flock, for the many great and valued blessings they enjoyed.'

One of them told, on this occasion, how 'a neighbouring minister, who had frequent cause to pass Mr. Robertson's church, on his way home at eventide, said to a friend, "What do these people get to meet about so often ? I never pass that place at night, but it is lighted up, as if something were going on." He was not far wrong. There *was* always something going on. If he had stepped in, he might have been politely introduced to a mission committee in one room, to a meeting of Christian instruction visitors in a second, and, possibly, to a committee of Sabbath-school teachers in a third, and he would have found them all engaged in devising schemes for securing greater efficiency in their several departments, or in seeking, in prayer, the blessing of God upon labour past, and the pouring out of His Spirit upon them, to fit them for future work.'

And it was owned that there was 'one ceaseless toiler, the example of whose unwearied personal labours stimulated others to activity, who, under a more passive leader, might have remained comparatively idle.'

Regarding this change, Mr. Young says :—

'For some years after it, while there was increase and expansion in various ways, Mr. Robertson seemed to feel the breaking up of the homely family character of congregational life, necessarily following a large increase of membership. The congregation became less homogeneous ; the older people looking back on the former temple, and the newer members eager for a new order of things in the new sphere.

'I remember well Mr. Robertson's last sermon in Duncan Street on, "And thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God led thee." The impression left on my mind that day was, that he was leaving the old place with regret, tinged with fear that he might not feel so much at home in the new building as he had done in Duncan Street.'

Mr. Robertson never felt that his congregation was right till it had, not only its Home Mission agents, but its own missionary in the Foreign field also.

In 1866, by special arrangement with the Foreign Mission Board, the station of Todgurh, India, was adopted as its own. The Rev. William Robb and Mrs. Robb, who were already working there, were both well known to, and esteemed by, the Newington people. This choice was appreciated by the labourers, who con-

sidered it a high honour, and no ordinary privilege ; and the assurance that Christian friends, known and unknown to them, were taking a deep interest, not only in themselves, but in the work to which they had consecrated their lives, tended greatly to stimulate and strengthen. From this time forward the communication with them formed an important and interesting item in the congregational history, and in the annual report.

The Newington people had, at various times, many missionaries and missionary families in their midst ; and thus it was not without a personal interest, that the children of the church and the mission district met weekly, when the need arose, to sew for such an object, for instance, as the orphan children cast on the missionaries' care in Calabar.

The shades of evening were, by this time, creeping gently over the 'beloved old father,' whose quiet life at Greenhill had been such a power for good in the home circle, and far beyond it.

' So unobtrusive in his manners, so sweet and gentle in his temper, so warm and genial in his affection, and so attentive to all the courtesies of life, that it is hard to conceive how the conduct of any one could afford a more lovely illustration of the apostle's exhortation, " Love as brethren ; be courteous." Yet it must be added that although his manners were so simple, and natural, and meek, there was a majesty about him—the majesty both of greatness and of

goodness. Love drew you to him irresistibly; but dignity repelled all unbecoming and vulgar familiarity. Even when he was prostrated by age and disease, one, on approaching his bed, could not fail to be awed by the look of majesty that lay on the calm and pleasant countenance of the dying patriarch.

‘ . . . It was a pleasant thing to visit his dying chamber. There was all light, without the slightest tinge of gloom. There was no rapture, no ecstasy, for his temperament was calm and serene. Yet there was the most sweet submission to the Divine will, and the full assurance of hope. He received his visitors with all his former courtesy, made his usual kindly inquiries after their own and their friends’ welfare, and spoke of his own weakness and approaching death with all the composure of one who feels assured that, in leaving this world, he is only going home.’<sup>1</sup>

To a friend Mr. Robertson writes:—

‘ I have just returned from Greenhill, where all is peace.’

Unable to be much with him, the son’s loving intercourse is thus kept up:—

‘ 6 Salisbury Road, Edinburgh,  
‘ 28th May 1867.

‘ My dear Father,—It makes me thankful to learn, by J.’s letter this morning, that you continue much as when I saw you last. I had hoped to get a run up this week again, but am prevented. . . .

‘ Our God is always beforehand with us, preventing us with the blessings of His goodness. Your hope is a strong

<sup>1</sup> From sermon preached after his death by Rev. J. Steedman.

anchor, which must hold firmly, till the calmer, brighter future comes—an anchor fixed in the very truth, and nature, and glory of God—immovable as the foundation of His eternal throne; for in His earnest desire to command our trust, He condescends to strengthen the force of His promise by adding to it the solemn confirmation of His oath. Should not a solitary promise have been enough for us—from the lips of Him who cannot lie? But like the stars of heaven for multitude are the assurances of the unsearchable riches of His grace. It seems as if He could not be content without our *entire* trust—“and they that know Thy name shall put their trust in Thee.”

‘It is delightful to think of the very narratives of the Old Testament and of the New as promises. God’s fidelity to Abraham—His watchful care of Joseph—His mercy to David—as all reasons and arguments for being persuaded that “He is faithful that promised.” Yet how apt we are to feel, or fear, as if He were in the habit of speaking beyond His meaning. We forget that “the Word of the Lord is tried,” refined, purified, like gold with no alloy,” and that He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.” He who “knoweth our frame,” who “was tried like as we are,” He to whom angels ministered, after His forty days’ fast in the wilderness, remembers what our infirmities are, and will send us help in time of need. If He seems to wait long, may we not believe that He answers us often by this very waiting—that He is working for us silently and surely, though we may not see clearly the effects of His love—that He is sending us help from His sanctuary, if He is keeping our trust in Him from failing.

‘During some past sleepless nights I have been thinking

much of you, and of the difference between your *winter* ones and your *summer* ones. They will not be tedious and dreary now, when the breath of nature is more “balmy.” Oh that our faith may every day be getting stronger, since every day is bringing us nearer to sight! How far beyond all the visions that faith ever beheld will be the grand realities, when we pass into the midst of them. Blessed gospel that enables you to say, “All this will soon be mine. All this, through grace, *is* mine already, and I am only waiting here, till He, who gives me all, shall call me home to His inheritance.”

‘We all unite in fervent love to you. Pray much for us all.—Your ever affectionate,

JAMES.’

The precious life, that continued to the end to be as it had been all through—only more elevated—was gently breathed out on the 24th December 1867—‘in the arms of love—the love of God, and the love of children.’

Mr. Robertson, in his letter to his father, alludes to the illegibility of his pencilling; and in another note to a friend, while ‘watching (at Greenhill) the flickering lamp of life,’ he says: ‘You see my poor hand is very unhandy.’

During the rest of his life, owing to paralysis of the fingers that hold the pen, writing became not only irksome, but extremely painful if long continued. This was specially the case during his weekly pulpit preparation—making the sermons much more costly





to him; whilst much of his correspondence, as well as other writing, had to be carried on with the help of one of his daughters as amanuensis. Thus a penmanship, that had been a model of neatness and beauty at first (as the adjoining *fac-simile* shows), became often difficult to decipher, even to those who were familiar with it. Not only had he this difficulty to contend with, but throughout his ministry, owing to his heart-trouble, he generally found it necessary to write in a kneeling posture for greater ease.

It will be easily understood that, as Mr. Robertson's great aim in his ministry—as to man—was salvation—‘full salvation’—his dealings with those who sought to make a public profession of their being partakers of this salvation would be as earnest, and true, and painstaking as with those who were simply seeking the salvation itself. Great was his delight to discover, in those who applied for church membership, a clear and firm grasp of truth, and evident subjection to its influence; while, at the same time, if any came with this object in view whom he thought not sufficiently enlightened, he would advise delay. The interval would be taken up in further teaching, which would sometimes issue in most satisfactory results, and then not without the warm gratitude of any thus dealt with.

In testing applicants, such questions as the following were often given, the answers to which were expected in writing; and when any of these papers

were particularly good, he could not conceal his joy over the writers :—

- Ques. 1. How may a sinner obtain peace with God ? on what grounds ?
2. In what respect does God's plan of saving sinners differ from the plans you used to take for obtaining salvation ?
3. Do you approve of *God's plan*, and rest on the *finished work* of Jesus, as your only hope ? Have you accepted the free gift of pardon *through Christ* ?
4. What are your motives for wishing to come to the table of the Lord ?
5. What are your thoughts of sin as you *now* view it ?
6. What think you of Christ ?

These were calculated to, and did, draw out not only the theoretical, but not a little of the practical and experimental.

It was not only the more matured whom he tried to draw out, and on whose minds he sought to impress truth by the use of pen or pencil ; he was frequently, in church or school, setting the children to search the Scriptures on some point or other, and getting them to send him the written results of their search, during the following week days. Many such papers were being constantly sent in. It might be a 'child's Bible alphabet' of texts and poetry ; or a Bible tree, with the main divisions or books of the Bible for

stems, and chapters or verses for leaves, etc.; or a clock, having each of the twelve divisions filled in with a Scripture passage, on the same subject—varied in length according to the hour; and many other various devices.

In particular cases he would ask them individually to write him letters regarding their spiritual state which it would not have been so easy to utter in words. This was done quite apart from any immediate view to church-membership, and bore good fruit—it might be in making plain even to themselves their present position, or in helping to develop the early buddings of Christian character.

In the course of his ordinary preaching, whatever would occur as a simple and useful exercise for the young would be thrown out as a hint—a remark aside to them, to let them feel they were never forgotten, and keep them on the outlook—with, ‘And the children will tell me so and so this week,’ or ‘when next we meet’—or some such form of request.

Still less were they forgotten on communion Sabbaths, when the familiar question, ‘Are the children in the gallery asking, like the young Israelites of old, “What mean ye by this service ?”’ was made the foundation of a few simple and tender words on the Christian feast and its significance.

Mr. Young says:—

‘When I joined the church under Mr. Robertson, his con-

versations with me, in that connection, were brief, but pointed, well calculated to bring out whether or not there had been personal decision. He gave me the questions of which you have a copy, and I wrote a letter in answer, detailing at once my spiritual experience, and my aims for the future of Christian profession and service.

‘In many cases, his conversation, even with those who brought “lines,” was very searching; and, in all cases, his dealing must have been awakening to thought, and strengthening for Christian purpose.

‘“Yes, sir, and it was hot work,” was the answer once given me by a new member, when I asked if he had had a talk with Mr. Robertson, on lodging his certificate.

‘Mr. Robertson made it a special feature of his work to seek to bring the young to early decision, and profession of Christ’s name. Not only did he afford opportunities of conversation to those who were thinking seriously, but he made opportunities—invited to his house—wrote notes—and in various ways sought to excite interest, or to ripen it where it had been awakened, and I am persuaded that many real conversions resulted from Mr. Robertson’s anxiety in this direction.’

Mr. Robertson thus writes to one of his sisters:—

‘October 1858.

‘. . . I do hope the Lord is showering down blessings on your class. Two young girls, applicants for admission to the Lord’s table from Miss M’L’s class, give very cheering evidence of having been *won* in the Sabbath school.

‘We have all eternity for talking of His wondrous works,

but we have only a little inch of time for inviting poor sinners into the ark. . . .

‘ Much affection, and praying that you may be satisfied with favour and filled with the blessing of the Lord. I can ask no more ! You can hold no more ! ’

When absent from home he wrote to a Sabbath-school teacher, some members of whose class had written to him in compliance with his parting request :—

‘ I owe you many thanks for your very kind attention to my wishes in your class. Will you thank these girls for me ? and say how much I feel interested in their communications. . . . My heart’s desire and prayer is that your unwearied instruction and care may be vital conductors by which they hold correspondence with heaven. And the effect upon yourself is sure to be the same that the tasting of the honey had on Jonathan.

‘ The Lord bless, keep, and shine upon you,—causing you to feel much of what the Scripture calls “abounding in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

‘ I have been passing through some luxuriant scenes of enchanting interest, and I feel their invigorating charm. How much of the first garden still mantles the ground ! Yet “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” ’

He wrote such ‘ Notes ’ as the following to members of the class :—

‘ My dear Friend,—I have ever looked on you with intense interest, and long to know your progress on your

heavenly way. Have you the Spirit of Christ, without which we are none of His? How important is this self-scrutiny! If we deceive ourselves in the affairs of the soul, the delusion may be fatal. I long for all the dear young people of my class to be patterns of holiness and devotedness, separated from the world, both in its pleasures and spirit. Are you in possession of present pardon and reconciliation to God? Can you call Him your Father, your own God? Has He made you His child? There is no middle state before God. Oh, bring not a divided heart to such a Friend and Saviour.'

'Are you aiming at exalted piety, eminent holiness, extensive usefulness? Holiness is the joy of heaven. Follow after holiness, and this will give higher joy to the angels around the throne than even to him whose anxieties, hopes, and fears have dictated these hasty lines.

'Is Christ your hope, and is every motive to holiness and obedience derived from this: "We love Him because He first loved us"?"

'Have you experienced those two distinct fruits of the Saviour's work: justification through His blood, as the foundation of your hope; and the Spirit's work in you, as the evidence that you are building on that one foundation?

'I feel most deeply anxious about you, and have uttered many an earnest prayer and desire for your speedy decision for God.'

## CHAPTER XIII.

### New Ties and Wider Service.

1872-1879.

IN course of time it was thought desirable that Mr. Robertson's congregational labours should be shared by another, and, accordingly, the Rev. John Young, M.A., whose student days had been spent under Mr. Robertson's ministry, was ordained as his colleague on the 2nd October 1872, and became doubly related when, on the 29th of the same month, he was married to Mary, eldest daughter of his senior colleague.

Shortly before these events, Mr. Robertson wrote to a ministerial friend :—

‘ Aug. 1872.

‘ What a privilege that you hear to-night the voice of that grand old Africen lion !<sup>1</sup>

‘ Ten thousand blessings on him !

‘ It would be a wonderful blessing to us at Newington to get though it were but ten minutes of him, especially at this time, when I feel so anxious to keep my people up to their annual £300 for India. They have all along given

<sup>1</sup> Moffat.

more a year for missions than for all congregational purposes, and I would not like it to be otherwise.

‘How joyfully I would see him in our pulpit, re-opening our church on the forenoon of Sabbath ! . . .

‘. . . *That* would be a *Re-decoration*.<sup>1</sup>

‘My great love for the dear old hero makes me bold.’

From the indications given in the earlier part of this volume of Mr. Robertson’s views of revival and evangelistic work, when it was by no means so generally approved as it is now, it may well be supposed that it was with no ordinary cordiality and readiness to co-operate, that he hailed such work as Mr. Moody’s. It went far to realize his heart’s desire, in the wise, clear, simple statement of gospel truth; in common-sense modes of dealing; and in most skilful, opportune, and apt application of the ‘Balm of Gilead’ to the wounds of sin.

No wonder he threw himself into it with all his heart; and in much both of sowing and reaping he was privileged to share during those highly-prized seasons.

In this connection there was much less that jarred on his finer sensibilities than in a great deal of the work carried on under the name of ‘Revival’ and ‘Evangelistic;’ hence his satisfaction in going along with it.

He was, however, on other occasions, often involved in a great deal of which he could not approve, as to

<sup>1</sup> The church had just been ‘re-decorated.’

modes of working and statements of truth; but it has been well said in reference to these, that Mr. Robertson's influence was always corrective. He could gather up the various elements, and, with his native courtesy, throw them into his own mould of balanced truth and judicious dealing.

During an evangelistic mission carried on in one of the cities, a friend, who was present at one meeting, tells that there had been a weekly record, in some periodical, of the number of supposed conversions. At this meeting, over which Mr. Robertson was presiding, some ardent friend had proposed that those conversing with the anxious should see to furnishing the exact number of those professing to have received enlightenment, for insertion in this paper.

Mr. Robertson then rose and slowly repeated (for singing) the words—

‘When God the people writes HE'LL COUNT,’

emphasizing the two last words; and, turning to the gentleman who made the proposal, he added in his kindly way: ‘I think, my friend, we may safely leave that to *Him!*’

Often has he been seen to writhe under statements which he could neither correct nor approve; and grieving over the misrepresentation of so sacred a cause, he would quietly sigh out, in leaving such meetings: ‘Oh, one would need a great deal of

love for the work, and faith in it, to be mixed up with such things as these.'

But as one of God's 'watchmen,' it was his duty to watch, and regulate, or guide, as far as he could, counteracting error, supplying truth; and if a movement could be used for good, to use it, however his credit might be affected. That was secondary.

Not that he did not care for his own good name. He was keenly sensitive on this point, but not only, nor, we believe, chiefly for his own sake, but for the sake of the message he bore—for the service he represented.

Some of his parting words in public to Mr. Moody at the close of one of the latter's visits to Edinburgh were these:—

'I am meeting from day to day with older Christians who wish they were young again—who wish they had been children at such a Christ-finding time as this. This very morning a father told me with deep emotion, how his young people had on recent evenings been coming home from the meetings saying there is beauty in Jesus, and wondering that all the world didn't see it too, and that they themselves had not seen it sooner. . . .'

'All this wonderful animation, and glow, and expansion of heart we have had here to-day, and on former days, is nothing to come of it but just to enjoy it, to devour it? Can we suffer to consume away in mere useless sparkle a blaze so precious, an element of mind which, while it burns, might be turned to some noble, practical purpose? Has not every one of the prayers here offered been a pledge that we will go forth on a Saviour's errand in quest of lost souls

that we will be the same in action as we have been in devotion? Will not the young among us, who say they are converted, show that they are converted—the flower of the army of the Captain of Salvation, having graven on their hearts their life motto—

“Hold the fort, for I am coming.  
By Thy grace we will.”

‘That visit of Mr. Moody’s’ (says Mr. Young) ‘was a landmark in Mr. Robertson’s life. It led to a widening out of his ministry, full of interest to him. Revival work had been familiar to him from his student days, and he was always in fullest sympathy with special evangelistic effort, within and outside of church organization. But he was exceedingly anxious about the fulness and depth of Scriptural teaching in connection with revival meetings, and very watchful against the exuberances of “zeal without knowledge.” Before Mr. Moody had been a week at work, Mr. Robertson was perfectly satisfied, and threw himself with his whole heart into the meetings, seldom missing one, although there were generally three in a day.

‘That winter, I believe, he was greatly blessed to many, and his labours were owned of God to the ingathering of not a little of the abundant fruit of that time of blessing. During 1874 he visited many places, either with Mr. Moody, or following up his work, and his services were largely drawn upon for special weeks of meetings or Conference services.’

At that time Mr. Young had been Mr. Robertson’s colleague for a year, and was able to relieve him, to a large extent, from congregational work during the

week. And it was not less with an eye to the ultimate benefit of his own people than of others, that Mr. Robertson entered so heartily into those outside movements. He hoped to return to them greatly refreshed, and to bring a blessing with him.

A friend says :—

‘He was “instant in season.” On Mr. Moody’s first visit to this country, when he was holding meetings in the North, Mr. Robertson went to join him ; and on his way thither in the train he spoke very earnestly to his fellow-travellers about spiritual things. They had not been accustomed to this, and seemed surprised, but soon became interested, and listened attentively. By and by it began to dawn on the mind of a Highlander, who had been listening in silent reserve, that he could account for this innovation. Folding his arms and drawing himself up with the air of one who was conscious of his superior discernment, he said to Mr. Robertson : “Oh ! you’ll be Moody and Sankey, are you ?”

‘Coming from Glasgow to Edinburgh, Mr. Robertson spoke so earnestly to the person sitting opposite him in the train, that when they got to Falkirk the man was deeply moved ; and as he left the train there, he shook hands with Mr. Robertson, and with tears in his eyes thanked him for his faithfulness, saying : “Never in all my life have I been spoken to in such a plain and kindly way about my soul. I will never forget you, sir.”

‘A Bible-woman was walking along Princes Street about nine o’clock one night, when Mr. Robertson, who was speaking to a young man, turned round and shook hands

with her, and then he went hurriedly away. The young man asked the Bible-woman who the gentleman was. She told him; upon which he remarked, "That man is in earnest. He is the first person that ever spoke to me about eternal things."

Further illustration of this is furnished by a member of his church, who was on one occasion passing along Causewayside, when a pleasant-looking woman—a stranger—came forward, and asked her if she would kindly show her the church in which Mr. Robertson preached. This was at once willingly done, when the woman said: 'I was anxious to see the place where *he* preached, for long ago he was tutor in a family where I was, and I used to do any little kindness to him I could—in looking after his clothes, and other little things; but he did far more for me—he led me to Christ.' An eloquent testimony to the skill of the student of those days as a winner of souls.

We are indebted to Mr. James Balfour, W.S., Edinburgh, for the following recollections of his association with Mr. Robertson, especially in evangelistic work:—

' . . . We did not belong to the same denomination, and were not thrown together by our ecclesiastical proclivities, but met first probably about 1859 or 1860, in the Monday noon meetings in Queen Street Hall, when there was a time of considerable revival in this country, as well as in America and Ireland. Our acquaintance soon became friendship. The more I knew him, the more I admired him, and used

to delight in the warmth of his spirituality, his tenderness and unction.

‘ It was, however, during Messrs. Moody and Sankey’s first visit to Edinburgh, in the winter of 1873–74, that I saw most of him. His short five-minutes addresses at the meetings were often very precious, having about them a great dash of genius, combined with uncommon fervour. But his prayers were usually more striking still—more so, I think, than those of any one whom I ever knew. He seemed always to be very near the throne himself, and he interceded with the holy familiarity of one who was often there, and who had come in by the blood-sprinkled way. He was present at that never-to-be-forgotten watch meeting on the night of the 31st of December 1873, at which Mr. Moody presided, and he took frequent part in it. There has seldom been a meeting at which the power of the Holy Spirit was more felt. It lasted for four hours, and they seemed to be so short. During the last ten minutes the vast audience that crowded the Free Assembly Hall knelt down and engaged in silent prayer. Amid its solemn stillness the clocks struck twelve, when the Jubilee Singers, who were present, in a soft whisper sang—

‘ “ There are angels hovering round  
To carry the tidings home.”

And they did carry the tidings home that night of the new birth of Maggie Lindsay, whose touching death on the railway a few days after created such a sensation. It was in a meeting such as that that Mr. Robertson was in his element, and he helped much to tone and elevate it.

‘ It was about this time that Mr. Robertson suggested

the clocks which for many years afterwards were famous among children.'

Whether or not the idea originated with him we cannot say, but we understand his first use of it was in visiting 'a boy who had been in long distress. Being told of weary, sleepless nights,' he threw out the hint that he might accompany the hours of the clock with Scripture passages. At one, he might think of a text of one word; at two, of two words, and so on. In a few days the boy, of his own accord, sent to Mr. Robertson the face of a clock, which he had *drawn out*, with the passages inserted at their appropriate hours. This led to the suggestion that other children might do the same, copying any style of clock they might prefer. One special subject was to be pursued in the case of each clock, for example—

One o'clock, 'Faith.'

Two     ,,     'Precious Faith.'

Three    ,,     'Lord, I believe.'

Four    ,,     'Have Faith in God;'

and so on for all the hours on the clock.

Mr. Balfour adds :—

'This gave the children a pleasing exercise of ingenuity in devising the clock, and of taste in drawing it, and it also sent them to their Bibles to search for texts. Several thousand clocks were sent to him, and some of them were charming.'

'Mr. Robertson frequently came to the Conferences at Perth, and enjoyed them much. I remember on one occa-

sion his standing near me on the platform when spiritual emotion was very strong in the meeting, and gently pressing my hand he said: "Either this is heaven or it is very near it." At another Conference he presided at the communion of the Lord's Supper, and gave *such* an address!—An English Christian of some eminence said to me afterwards, he could compare it to nothing but a string of pearls.'

Leaving Mr. Balfour's later reminiscences to a later stage, we return to Mr. Young's account:—

'There is one phrase I constantly associate with Mr. Robertson: "The free offer of the gospel." That was the characteristic of his ministry; and I have never met any one who could put the way of acceptance in such winsome persuasiveness, and in such manifold variety of form and illustration. In nearly every sermon he had some passage exhibiting the simple gospel plan; and there were some modes of putting it of such frequent recurrence that they became very familiar to all who were acquainted with his preaching.

'One, in the form of a dialogue between law and grace, or righteousness and mercy, he used to give quite dramatically; and another, in which the conscience soliloquized on its determination not to be content with getting into God's blessed presence by any back way, or on any plea short of a full, straightforward acquittal and welcome, was very striking, even when frequently heard. He was very jealous of any preaching which was not clear and explicit on that point; but doctrinal accuracy in a preacher was not enough for him; there must be the spiritual earnestness of the messenger, conscious of the importance of his message.

‘To me a very striking feature in Mr. Robertson’s ministry was the extent of church organization which he set agoing, and helped to keep agoing, in light of the fact that he had not naturally what men often call the business gift. For details of organization and church business, in the ordinary sense, he had no turn. His physical weakness made him timid in proposing schemes which might lead to discussion, and, to some extent, unfitted him for launching, and carrying through their initial difficulties, new enterprises. He had a constitutional aversion to “new fangledness,” and had no love for change of methods, in starting societies, and multiplying branches of organization. And yet Newington was well organized, its work was constantly branching out along new lines ; and not a few schemes of effort, exciting opposition, or at least serious discussion, were launched and made successful.

‘If Mr. Robertson, as he often laughingly confessed, was not a business man, and did not feel so comfortable in a committee meeting as elsewhere, he had the faculty of discerning character, and using the business gifts and organizing faculties of others ; and the power of impressing the desirability of some new thing’s being done on some one, who was able to plan the work, plead for it, and carry it to a successful issue. This was one great secret of his success in congregational enterprise ; and it explains the extent to which different branches of the church work were associated largely with single men. I always look upon his success in organizing a church as a great encouragement to ministers who think they have not the business gift, and as calculated to enforce the truth that a minister’s work is often best done by inspiring and leading other people to work.

‘ His outside work took chiefly these two special forms, as preacher to Children, and as evangelist and Conference-worker in his last days.

‘ His almost entire abstinence from Presbytery and Synod work, and the small share he took in what may be described as platform work, gave to some people the impression that he took little interest in ecclesiastical and public questions. But this I believe to be a mistake. His physical weakness, his fear of excitement, and his constitutional dislike of business details, unfitted him for taking a prominent part in debate ; and the characteristic neatness of his style, and more meditative mode of thinking and speaking, scarcely found a congenial sphere on the public meeting platform. No man, however, was more efficient as a chairman of some great children’s gathering, or as a speaker on behalf of our benevolent and missionary societies.

‘ The Temperance cause was very dear to him. His views were pronounced upon every aspect of this question, and he seldom let slip an opportunity of speaking a decisive word in favour of total abstinence. He had no liking for what used to be known as “short pledges,” or any other half-hearted way of facing what he felt to be a tremendous evil. He was “total,” as he used to say, and generally expressed himself as having little faith in measures not on the line of total abstinence.

‘ For a man so mild and gentle in his natural temperament, Mr. Robertson’s speaking in public and private on our drinking usages, and the need of total abstinence, both for safety and example, was exceedingly strong and decided. Few questions stirred him more deeply. Gospel temperance was an oft-recurring theme in the Newington pulpit, and

it gave him great delight when, on the occasion of my ordination, it was heartily agreed by the session that the ordination dinner should be conducted on total abstinence principles—a much less common thing fourteen years ago than it happily is now.

‘Mr. Robertson was a conscientious Voluntary. He held the principle firmly, and had faith in it, as supplying the only solution of ecclesiastical difficulties, and the surest means of support for true spiritual work. It was his conviction of the evil practical results of the State Church system, as hindering the work of home evangelization, and lowering the tone and standard of spiritual life, that bulked most largely in his conversation and public utterances on this subject. I was often surprised by the intensity of feeling and keenness of interest he displayed in regard to the matter, and the warmth with which he supported the movement for the emancipation of the State Churches. A few weeks after my ordination, he asked me to preach a special sermon, making clear my position in relation to Voluntaryism ; “but,” he said, “leave to me my favourite text on that question : ‘Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.’” He was a lover of good men in whatever Church they were found ; but his hatred of evil principles was none the less because they had taken captive good men whom he loved. He was jealous for the honour of the Holy Spirit, which he felt to be compromised by dependence on the arm of flesh, and he prized highly his position as minister of a Church, whose history proved to demonstration the power of Christian love, begotten of the Spirit, to maintain and extend Christ’s cause in the world.’

## CHAPTER XIII.

### Family Bereavements.

1874-1876.

THE time came for the family nest to be broken up. Mrs. Robertson had been subject occasionally to severe bronchial illnesses for several years. During one of them Mr. Robertson wrote:—

‘The Lord has graciously granted us a little reviving. It is only “for a season, if need be,” that the heaviness will last. . . . How precarious all things beneath the skies! How entire our dependence on God Himself for bliss! How delightful the prospect of our home on high, where no evil will be felt or feared any more for ever!

‘May we all be kept looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life. . . .’

In the autumn of 1874, the mother herself wrote to her daughter in Glasgow:—

‘The winter lies before me like a dark cloud, and I fear to enter into the cloud, but may it be to me as it was to the disciples, to see more of the beauty and glory of Jesus.’

Towards the end of the year, while anxious hearts were looking and longing for the breaking up of an intense and prolonged frost, he thus expressed his fears :—

‘ 29th December.

‘ I cannot longer delay letting you know what distress we are in on my beloved B.’s account. This weather has brought on what the doctor speaks of as the worst bronchial illness she has ever had. . . . Pray for us, that, amid all the distraction of feeling, there may be rest in the calm ranges of that high word : “ As thy day so shall thy strength be.”

‘ Mary is not at all strong, also much affected by the severity of the season.

‘ Shall any of us ever regret the hottest flame of the furnace, if it burn away our bonds, and make more clear and beautiful the presence of the Son of God ?—Your afflicted and affectionate brother,

J. R.’

The furnace heat was not abated when he wrote, two days later, to a niece :—

‘ 31st December 1874.

‘ My heart is so rent, I cannot write more than the mournful message :

‘ My dearly beloved B.—mine no more. The Lord has taken her Home.

‘ A sore attack of her bronchitis set in with this sad weather last week. She seemed to rally for a while, and we were all hopeful—the doctor too ; but this morning

exhaustion suddenly supervened, and at half-past ten she exchanged earth for heaven.

‘What a precious treasure we have lost !

“Even so, Father !”

‘You and your dear husband will help us by your prayers to lay this heavy burden down at the feet of Jesus.—Your deeply afflicted but ever affectionate uncle, J. R.’

It cannot soon be forgotten how, that last night of the year, with a heart at the breaking, the father led the bereaved circle, at the time of evening prayer, in the trustful vindication of his Father’s love : ‘Thou hast done us no wrong.’ Nor how, that sad day, when he returned to his darkened home, from which she had just been carried, the first words he uttered were : ‘The Lord prepared the gourd, and the Lord prepared the worm.’

No one could depend more on his home ties—on the perfect sympathy of loving companionship ; and to be bereft of this was, for him, to be terribly left out in the cold.

Literally—physically, his heart was severely tried under any grief. His changed looks under this one showed it.

The friends among whom he spent the first weeks of his widowhood knew what sad and wakeful and suffering nights he had. In the morning he would pour forth the richest truth that had been cheering him during his long waking hours, leaving no room to doubt that he was drinking at the Fountain of

Consolation so eagerly, and freshly, and fully, that it was not possible to do otherwise than stand aside and listen, with the feeling that no comfort could be stronger than that which he was drawing for himself—passages of Scripture invested with new meaning and new refreshment, in the new circumstances.

Thus he wrote soon after: ‘When Hagar’s bottle is spent, God’s own fountain comes more fully into view. May He make us willing to be trained to a higher life !’

Next to the ‘Fount of everliving Love,’ nothing comforted him more than giving vent to what a friend quoted calls his ‘quenchless sympathy for others,’ and he was open as ever to outward appeals to it. He did not allow himself to be shut up in a selfish, fruitless grief. To parents bereft of their boy the day after Mrs. Robertson died, he wrote:—

‘My dear afflicted Friends,—I wish I could be with you to mingle my tears with yours. Is it not best to think of the joy of our beloved ones, all whose tears have been wiped away, and of the joy of Jesus in preparing a place for them, and in welcoming them home for ever?

‘He hath said, I will never leave thee.—Yours in tenderest sympathy,

J. R.’

Miss A. B. Church writes, and the words are appropriate to such a time as this:—

‘He was a true Barnabas—a son of consolation, and had learned, as few do, how to *show* as well as feel sympathy ; and one could not help feeling that the comforts, so tenderly

and skilfully administered, were just those wherewith he had been himself comforted of God.

‘We will never forget what he was to us in a protracted season of deep trial, when one very dear to us was dying in a distant land, far removed from friends and kindred. Often, in the lonely evening hours, the door would open, and his kind face appear. Then, sitting down amongst us, he would listen to all we had to tell, and to all our anxious thoughts and fears.

‘Then, quietly turning to “Jesus in the midst,” he would lay the whole case out before Him, whose strong arm and loving heart were as near to the sufferer, at the Antipodes as they were to us.

‘This informal turning from the friends seen to the great unseen but ever-present Friend, was a characteristic of Mr. Robertson, which all who knew him cannot fail to recognise. It was very real to him, the Lord’s hearkening and hearing, when those who feared Him and thought upon His name were talking one to another.

‘There was always something very restful and refreshing in his little visits. Never unduly protracted, they were, at the same time, never hurried. He seemed always to have leisure to let us unburden our hearts—a delicate process, to which any sign of haste or impatience effectually puts a stop.

‘He knew well how to adapt himself to our aged mother’s varying moods—sometimes being tender and sympathetic, and again playful and cheery, by his humorous sallies putting to flight the depression often attending constant suffering; then sweetly leading away her thoughts above and beyond herself to Jesus and His love, he would in the end leave her as bright and happy as himself.’

As to his own loss, he was, as he said, ‘trying to forget, yet vowing never to forget.’ In conversation with Mr. Moody about it, he applied to Mrs. Robertson words already familiar: ‘She “lived so near Heaven that, when she died, she had not far to go.”’

To a daughter, after Mrs. Robertson’s death:—

‘January 1875.

‘My very dear M——,—He will not suffer us to be tried above what we are able to bear. Had we ever any conception of what a loving Friend and Father He is, till these surges of sorrow flung us on His sympathy! Surely the precious tie, now sundered on earth, has knit us all to the family in heaven! What would become of us if we did not pillow our hearts on the Eternal Heart!’

His eldest daughter, Mrs. Young’s health, to which he refers in a note quoted, had been for some time giving grave cause for concern, and was now prolonging the tension that was trying him.

The following period of trial and bereavement will be best recorded in his own words:—

‘Glasgow, 29th January 1875.

‘The Heavenly Refiner makes use of such kindness as yours in tempering the heat. As with Elijah on Carmel, the answer is first by fire, and then by rain. First the fiery trial, then the descent of the Spirit’s grace, as rain upon the mown grass. I have been sleeping somewhat better since coming here. Not sure whether I may venture to the home pulpit next Sabbath. . . . What most perplexes and

dismays us here will enhance our happiness to all eternity. . . . It is a blessed hope. Without these hedges of thorns on the right hand and the left, would we not have missed the way to heaven?

‘. . . The Lord liveth, blessed be our Rock—

‘As God, able to save to the uttermost,

‘As man, to sympathize to the uttermost.

““I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”

‘. . . Best wishes for the sick man.’<sup>1</sup>

‘Edinburgh, 18th February.

‘Every day seems rather to augment the blank here.

‘It is ever present, ever pressing;

‘But she is singing while we sigh.

‘I am hastening out to the prayer-meeting, to try to speak of our bitter waters sweetened.

‘By and by the *Marahs* will be all past, and there will be fulness of joy, without mixture—without interruption—without end.

‘Am keeping as busy as the broken wing allows. The dear lassies here as kind as can be. . . .’

‘Edinburgh, August 1875.

‘I feel thankful that you are relieved from anxiety in regard to ----. I wish I could say the same as to our dear M.’s case. . . . Oh, to view all difficulties in the light of the promises, leaving out all ifs, and buts, and whys. . . .

‘. . . No Gethsemane without its strengthening angel—else my strength and hope had perished.

<sup>1</sup> A poor man working from home, who was thought dying, and whom he had been called to visit during the early days of his bereavement.

‘During these two days past the surges of anxiety have been swelling in regard to our darling Mary. She had another startling return of illness suddenly on Sabbath forenoon, during church time, when she was sitting quietly by the fireside. No proximate cause . . . the weakness that has followed proportionate. The rallying power much less. We were just getting arrangements into shape for Bournemouth. Now on the front of the veil is written, “Stand still and see.”

‘You know the heart-sickness,  
‘You will help us to bear.

‘We must “tarry the Lord’s leisure” ere anything can be done. . . .’

The invalid was able to go to Bournemouth for the winter, where her father visited her the following spring, after fulfilling some evangelistic engagements in London.

We now resume Mr. Balfour’s story:—

‘It was my privilege frequently to go with Mr. Robertson to evangelistic meetings in different parts of the country, and then I used to enjoy and be refreshed by his sanctified conversation. Once I was with him in London when a series of evangelistic meetings were being held for about a fortnight. Wherever he went he was welcomed, but his addresses to children, which were probably unrivalled, were most appreciated. I remember on one occasion, when standing in a church packed by children, he got their attention at the very first by beginning with a dumb show. He repeated the action twice over without saying a word. He crossed

his arms, pointed to himself and then pointed upwards. After doing so he said that a deaf and dumb girl had recently come into his study and made that motion, by which she meant to say that Christ was crucified on the cross—for her—and that He had afterwards gone up to heaven. It added to the interest of the story when a deaf and dumb girl in the church screamed. She understood the sign although she heard nothing that was said, but cried with that inarticulate cry with which the dumb give expression to their feelings when excited.'

On Mr. Robertson's return to Edinburgh he found the elder of his two daughters there, Eliza, prostrate with fever.

He writes to a sister abroad :—

‘ March 1876.

‘ Your tender sympathy and William's were truly valued, and sorely needed. Saturday and yesterday have been sad days to us. On Saturday morning, sickness, with subsequent deep sinking and heavy moanings, for many hours—then followed shiverings, a very bad symptom. The methods used for checking these seem to have been blest, for they have not returned to-day, but there are some tokens of jaundice having set in. . . . The beloved sufferer is sweetly unmurmuring and calm. I have felt tossed from billow to billow as on a stormy sea.

‘ But our best Friend has never done me an unkind thing all my days, and this is not one.

‘ Help me to take loving views of Him who directs the storm. You will both pray without ceasing for me, and write as often as you can.’

To another, later:—

‘. . . The doctor has just left. *No cheer.* Another of these sad shivering fits came on, and since it passed off higher fever has followed, and sharp, quick respiration. — has the impression the crisis has not yet come. Little strength left in my darling to meet it.

‘I understand better the Syrophenician’s cry, “Lord, help me,” by helping *her*; and the pleading of Jairus for his child.

‘She has told me she is leaning on His love.

‘Pray that He may be our arm every hour, to which clinging we shall not faint.—Your much distressed, . . .

‘J. R.’

The desolate dreariness of this time to one so sensitively anxious in his concern both for Eliza and for those who were watching, it would be hard to express. Much he needed—absolutely needed—his Divine Refuge, and it was well he had it.

After alternating hopes and fears, and amid all gospel comfort, one more helpful life—and a bright one—was taken from his household—the one that had been to him for a right hand, and had also chiefly taken the place and duties of her departed mother.

Mr. Robertson’s regular Newington ministry was thus broken in upon by closely following years of grief, during great part of which he was necessarily much absent from home, and specially from the time of this daughter’s death.

To Jessie, the only daughter left at home, her father

clung with intense tenderness. The youngest of six, she had been a good deal the companion of both parents, whilst the elder ones were occupied at school, and had artlessly and unconsciously taken in much of the goodness and elevation of both, and was 'not of the world,' without being aware of it.

Whenever the last sad scenes were over, Mr. Robertson took her from home for change. Her health, however, had been severely shaken, and as feverish symptoms began to manifest themselves, she was taken to her sister's home in Glasgow, where, for many weeks, her troubled father watched the life on which not only his natural affections, but also his home and work in Edinburgh, so much depended.

'13th April 1876.

'Our hopes have been driven back. Let the Lord have His own way with us, for He is love. Our darling Jessie has not improved. . . . My whole life seems blighted.

““Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

‘You will not cease to help us to put the heavy case into the Hands that were nailed to the cross for us, and to leave it there. With a heart full of anxiety and anguish,—Your ever affectionate . . .

J. R.’

Whilst he was passing through these sorrows, and resident chiefly in Glasgow, at the house of his son-in-law, Mr. Joseph C. Robertson, which was much more than in name the home of his later days, many opportunities arose for such incidental work as his strength could cope with. The number of these

opportunities gradually increased ; and the variety of scene and circumstance, along with the uniformly hearty welcome he received, did not a little to cheer him under his trials.

‘ Not that he lost interest by any means in his own people ’ (adds Mr. Young), ‘ but a wider sphere meantime drew him out, by its many opportunities for specially interesting work ; and he obeyed the call for service which few could render so well as he, and which suited his state of health and temperament at the time better than the systematic, and sometimes perhaps routine work inseparable from close attention to one congregation, and certainly opened up a means of relief to his burdened heart which he might not have had in the wonted services at home.’

Meanwhile his eldest daughter, Mrs. Young, whose declining health had been affected for the worse by the loss of her sister, had come from Bournemouth to Norwood, London, in the warmer weather of April ; the kind sisterly friend who had been with her all winter, still accompanying her. For two days she seemed to revive a little, but the end had come.

We quote the sacred and tender story written at the time by the friend (Mrs. C.) in whose house she died :—

‘ 27th April 1876.

‘ . . . Darling Mary was here when the Lord came for her. . . .

‘ My sister and I called for them with the carriage at 12 o’clock, and Mary seemed truly happy to come with us.

She enjoyed the drive so much, was full of admiration of the glorious day, the blossoming trees, and the pleasant air.

‘The brightest flowers were gathered to make the table pretty for the sweet fragile guest, and she admired them much.’

After luncheon, while passing from one room to another, . . . ‘the sad stroke came so overpoweringly, that before the doctor could come, the gentle spirit had passed away ; while dear Miss Y., our good Mary Anne, and I, supported her, sitting on the floor, near the parlour door—we dared not move her for doing harm. She was very soon unconscious, and long we sat, unwilling to believe it was over, and yet feeling that she was not there ; until the doctor came, and, with M. A., carried her up to the room . . . which is now our *best* room.

‘She looked like the purest marble, with an expression of tender graciousness and sweet content most consoling to look on ; but oh ! to see the lately animated, beautiful face pale in death, while the flowers were bright on the table, and the half-finished fruit on her plate !

‘The text of the day was : “He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.”

‘M. A. laid soft white blossoms in the dear hands, as they lay folded on her breast. . . .’

To this friend Mr. Robertson wrote :—

‘28th April 1876.

‘My dear Sister,—“The Lord deal very kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.”

‘It has been a sevenfold heated furnace—heated, not by

the “wrath of the King,” but by His love. The thought on which I rest in connection with all the circumstances is, that what Omniscient Love had planned, Omniscient Love brought to pass, in the way, and place, and time which was best for our profit, and for His praise.

‘Oakpark is now more than ever endeared to us all. Our hearts cannot cease to turn to it as a hallowed home. That *you* should have ministered so tenderly to the last moments of our darling Mary, the good Lord bless you for it. I am often on the brink of being “swallowed up” by these “sorrows upon sorrows.” I can only hang in utter helplessness upon Himself—no other righteousness—no other strength. You will continue to help me, by your prayers, to say, “Even so, Father”?’

A mournful company returned to Edinburgh, where they laid their treasure in the Grange Cemetery, beside those already ‘gathered.’

To friends abroad, on the funeral day, Mr. Robertson wrote:—

‘Glasgow, 28th April 1876.

‘You will be getting about this time the sad announcement which good Mr. M. wrote for me.

‘. . . “Earth is a desert drear!”

‘Our desolation deep! Christ’s consolation deeper!

‘. . . Oh, precious treasure. . . *He* gave thee, *He* took thee, and *He* will restore thee!

‘3 o’clock. This is about the hour when our cave of Machpelah will be reopening, to receive all that was mortal of that dear, fine form. . . .

‘The doctor interdicted my attempting to go through. I have been in bed most part for some days.

‘The effect of all this on dear Jessie has been more prostrating—especially at first; now she is calm and trustful. Her inestimable life has been trembling in the balance. We trust the Lord is having mercy—not on her only, but on us also, lest we should have sorrow upon sorrow. . . .

‘“Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.”

‘As our treasures accumulate in heaven, our affections are more closely drawn thither. What a heaven it is! The many mansions—the welcome home—the Father’s smile—the presence of Jesus—the bright river of the Spirit’s grace—the companionship of the angels and of the redeemed—the perfect service, and the perfect rest!’

To another friend :—

‘6th May 1876.

‘. . . “Mary—Rabboni—”

‘“As soon as ‘the other Mary’ heard that”—“the Master is come, and calleth for thee”—“she arose quickly and came unto Him.”

‘Wasn’t it at the very time when his soul was so “cast down within him,” that he called God his “exceeding joy” . . . ?

‘I would have written day by day, had I known well what to say about our darling Jessie; but no sooner are our hopes lifted up, than they are cast down again. And this is the case to-day. The temperature higher than for some

time. We thought there had been a crossing of the bar, but it looks otherwise at present. . . .

‘Assure dear —— of my true sympathizing love under his infirmities. With all the fulness of sympathy treasured up for us in Jesus by the way, and with the bright prospect before us of a joyful reunion for ever, in glory, at the end, have we not enough to change the spirit of heaviness into the garment of praise ?

‘My heart blesses you for going on the 28th.

‘“I will be a God to you.”

‘“God is love.”

‘That is, I will be to you love, nothing but love. Doesn’t it throw a glowing tint over all His dealings ?

‘“Though the fig-tree shall not blossom . . .

Yet will I rejoice in the Lord.” . . .’

A season of increasing hope was allowed as summer drew on. The invalid rallied, and visits designed to secure gradual change were made to Bothwell, and Pitlochry, and Braemar, while arrangements were being made to spend the winter abroad. Mr. Robertson was a good deal with her, both on her account and his own.

From Salisbury Road (10th July) he wrote to a niece of the necessity of being at home on two successive Sabbaths, adding :—

‘I will be glad between times to take a run to you if possible. For these rooms that used to ring with the music of such happy voices—so silent now—it touches—oh, so deeply!—the fountain of tears. But the Hand that has taken our treasures is the same Hand that opens our eyes to see

the infinite blessedness of a sanctified sorrow. What links we have to the heavenly home, where we hope to be gathered ere long—unbroken households.

‘Mrs. W. spent yesterday with us (in church and here), and many . . . memories were revived. B. was with her—a choice son of a choice mother. . . .

‘. . . Our anxieties and sorrows are not out of God’s plan. They are necessary parts of it. “He led them forth by the right way.” . . .

‘The Lord often suffers us to be driven into a corner, that we may know experimentally how necessary He is to us. But His heart of mercy can never be unkind. . . .

‘. . . You will understand how we are pressed. “In the world, tribulation ; in Me, peace.” . . .

‘What though our way be hedged on every side with thorns if it keep us in the way to glory. . . .’

With reference to Mr. McDowall, then under severe paralysis, who seemed to be just on the margin of the river, though he was not yet to be called to cross it:—

‘Edinburgh, July 1876.

‘How your heart would have melted, had you heard at our prayer-meeting last night such tenderness of intercession for you all. Even from the lips of such as did not know him well ; but he is greatly loved by my people. . . . I trust the excitement he seemed under, when I had to tear myself away, left no bad effect, and that his heart continues the gushing fountain of many glad, bright thoughts. Will these verses help?

‘“In the multitude (the conflict)  
Of my thoughts within me,  
Thy comforts delight my soul.”

“ My times are in Thy hand.”

“ We trust not in ourselves,  
But in God, who raiseth the dead.”

“ It is the Lord, whose mighty skill  
Can, from our sorrows, raise  
Matter eternity to fill  
With ever-loving praise.”

“ Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop ; but a good word (the good word of God in the gospel) maketh it glad.”

“ The glorious gospel of the blessed God,” viz. “ the glad news about the glory of the good God.”

“ Thy statutes have been *my songs* in the house of my pilgrimage.”

“ I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.”

“ Will you ask him what word he has to send me to cheer me in my loneliness here ? You will assure him of my unceasing affectionate remembrance of him. . . .”

This is a small indication of an almost daily ministration, that went on for several weeks, during his own heavy anxieties, by a sick-bed at which, for the most part, he could not be personally present, and at which his constant remembrance and scriptural suggestions were no small cheer, both to the sufferer and the anxious attendants.

With unexpected revival of strength—

‘ Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead ?

‘ I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to *lie down*, saith the Lord.’

To the sufferer himself :—

‘ Braemar, 17th August 1876.

‘ May I venture on a line or two to yourself now, when I am so glad and grateful to know that you are so much revived? The answer to prayer for you, “ through the thanksgiving of many,” now “ redounds to the glory of God.” Haven’t you been learning a new mystery of Christ, that His promise is to be believed in spite of all adverse appearances?

‘ At His coming again, if not sooner, these knots shall be all untied, these riddles all explained, and these clouds all cleared away. We shall see the good of apparent evil, and the life that lay in the bosom of death.

‘ I have been labouring to turn away my eyes from the waves to the Rock, while trying to sketch a sermon on Heb. x. 19, 20 : “ Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus—and having an High Priest over the house of God.”

‘ These two things embolden us in going to God amid the full blaze of His holiness,—The Open Door, and The Friend to welcome us when we go in.

‘ 1st. The open door—“ by the blood of Jesus”—by the outpoured Life—on which the Father looks, and righteously says to all who are pointing to the same, “ Live ; ” and then, 2nd, The Friend to welcome us within the veil—Jesus Himself—the ever-living Priest, leading us in by His Spirit, and presenting Himself for us—our all-glorious Substitute and Intercessor, keeping our place for us in heaven till we get there. Are not these sure grounds of confidence abundantly enough for us when we leave the body, and pass, as

naked spirits, into the open—the immediate—the propitious presence of the Holy One ?

‘Can there be anything now, on God’s side, against any sinner entering in by this way ? Is it not as free to us the first time as the thousandth, and the thousandth time as the first ?

‘Oh, how immensely does our estimate of Jesus fall short of His preciousness ! It must be so for ever, since His preciousness is infinite.

‘Shall we not be thankful for our broken hearts, since they are in the hands of so skilful and so tender an Up-binder ?’

## CHAPTER XIV.

‘Clouds after Rain.’

1876–1877.

ARRANGEMENTS were now made, by which Mr. Robertson obtained leave of absence from Newington for the winter, in order to accompany his daughter Jessie to San Remo. He was cheered by the hope that her health might be benefited by a stay in that sunny region ; and he gladly undertook the congenial work of ministering to the invalids resorting thither, and conducting the services of the station maintained there by the United Presbyterian Church for their benefit.

The journey south was taken in October—not without much concern, because the restoration of her on whose account chiefly he was going had been so very partial.

To the friend in London in whose house he stayed on the way he writes :—

‘Paris, 19th October 1876.

‘Dear kind Mrs. C.,—Much you are in my thoughts and in my heart. The memory of your goodness follows us continually.

‘ May your tabernacle ever abide in peace, under “the goodwill of Him who dwelt in the bush.” The journey has been accomplished without any apparent harm, though our darling child has been considerably exhausted. There was bright sunshine all around us by the way, and there is always bright sunshine for the heart in nearness to the Saviour. We are always sure to get it by going to Him, and we can always get to Him through the Word, and by yielding to the drawings of the Comforter.’

While he was on his journey, the sick-bed in Alloa was not forgotten, though he had enough otherwise to fill his heart and thoughts. He wrote from Paris :—

‘ I hope to hear, before leaving, of your dear invalid. May I send him this keepsake text, the echo of which has been ringing in my mind since standing by Napoleon’s tomb : “ Yea, HE shall live.” What a well-spring of comfort, that over the heart which beats with infinite love is a breast-plate that is never off, bearing our names. It sends a gleam of sunshine through the darkest cloud.’

The arrival at San Remo was announced :—

‘ 31st October.

‘ “ They of Italy salute you.” . . . Dear invalid considerably fatigued, but recovering slowly.’

To his daughter at home he says :—

‘ 4th November.

‘ . . . My anxieties about our darling child are more than I can utter.

‘ Grand, solemn, almost awful petition *that*, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

“ My God, my Father, while I stray  
Far from my home, on life’s rough way,  
Oh teach me from my heart to say,  
Thy will be done.”

‘ If the joy of Jesus is double compensation for all He suffered, then surely also will ours be. For every pain and sigh there will soon be myriads of Allelujahs. The blessedness of that rest will exceed, beyond compare, the toils and the conflicts of the way. “I will render double unto thee.”’

To Mr. M'Dowall, still in great weakness:—

‘ 1st December.

‘ The Lord bless you, my beloved brother, for your kind word in season, just received. “Wait on the Lord, and He shall strengthen thine heart.” He walks the billows with us, and we hear Him say, “It is I.”

‘ May I send you in return this cheer: “In all things we are more than conquerors, through Him who loved us.”

‘ It is not said we *shall be*, but “*we are*.” We overcome our foes before they come.

‘ He will “make us kings and priests.”

‘ He “hath *crowned* us with loving-kindness,” to tell up yonder, to “principalities and powers,” how faithful His love has been, and how we have discovered it, in the furnace and amid the flames. Will not this be everlasting wealth? May we not well be grateful to Him that He is putting us now in the way of learning it?

‘I cannot hear of you too often. I wish it every day. Much of His tender mercy have we seen and tasted together, and He keeps His best to the last. “Light is sown” for you. Eternity with its unutterable joys, and your entailed inheritance safe—infallibly safe in your Redeemer’s keeping. Are not His pleadings for you the sowing and the storing up of bliss for you? Shall you not get back the priceless seed-corn, multiplied ten thousand times ten thousand? Oh, does not our loveliest music fall flat, compared with the praises due to “Him who loved us”?

‘My darling Jessie continues much as she was.

‘Neither sun nor stars for a good long while appeared, but we are “casting out our anchors, and longing for the day.”

‘The work that lies to my hand here among the sick and sorrowful is intensely interesting. Two discourses every Sabbath, besides three others in Bible-reading meetings, during the week. You will be asking much blessing for us—a loosened hold of earth, and a tightened grasp of Christ and of heaven.’

To another :—

‘20th December.

‘. . . Jessie has been sending Christmas cards to all her special friends, in place of letters, which she is quite unable to write. The putting them in the envelopes has exhausted her. You may judge how weak she is, yet how sweetly patient and happy in the love of God. All the length I have got Dr. —— to go is, “Well, I daresay she is a little better than she was when she came out.” . . . The Lord raises up kind friends here, some of them total strangers, till drawn to her by her loveliness and Christ’s love.

‘I long to hear particulars of dear ——. May I send him 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17. My heart often hovers about his room and his bed. “Sweet to lie passive.”

‘My work here does much to sustain me. Six services now every week — one of them peculiarly touching, for native children. I address them through an accomplished interpreter.’

‘3rd January 1877.

‘. . . Every spare moment from Jessie is filled up with my work, and I can only send assurances of constant love, with all the greetings of the season, in trite phrase, but with tenfold earnestness. Round the cape of this season what ships of memory come floating, freighted with loving recollections of those who have reached the “desired haven” and the “golden city.”

‘This work is full of interest. I wish I had time to tell you all. It would melt your heart to hear the native children, at the children’s meeting, singing in their own tongue, “Safe in the arms of Jesus,” to our own familiar tune—

‘“ Sieuro in man di Cristo,  
Sieuro nel suo cor,  
L’anima mia reposa  
All’ombra dell’amor.”

‘Oh, pray for “strengthening with all might unto all patience.”’

‘26th January.

‘Our darling has been under an attack of congestion, caused by the sudden change of weather and the keen east winds. . . . Your hearts will be with us, apprehending the

depth of our anxieties, and pleading for us. . . . How sweetly calm she is! So like her own precious mother and yours.

‘“Calm me, my God, and keep me calm,  
When such sad breezes blow.” . . .

‘“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”’

‘13th February.

‘Go on, dear ——, believably, lovingly spreading our case before the Lord. Symptoms this morning less favourable. . . . Our darling Jessie’s patience is a wonderful illustration of the ripeness of her Christian character, and complete surrender to God. Will praying friends help us to lean hard on the arm that never wearies and is never withdrawn?’

To Mrs. C. :—

‘14th February 1877.

‘. . . In such warmth of kindnesses as yours she recognises God’s own love, and they taste the sweeter because she finds God in them all. Blessed be His name for anything that shuts us up to treat the truths of the Bible as realities, especially the great truth that centres in a circle round the cross. How it lifts us above all circumstances of time, and place, and change, giving us a resting-place that is permanent in the midst of all that is passing and perishing; and the more we look at it, the more we are filled with a calm and satisfying gladness. . . .

‘Wherever our tent may be pitched, whatever may be the day’s hard march on towards the land of promise, is there not always by our side a well—the well of God’s own love?

‘You will not cease to pray for us, that out of that well

our faith may drink more largely, and that each draught may send us on our way rejoicing—it may be “as sorrowful—yet alway rejoicing.” . . .’

To another:—

‘26th February.

‘ . . . How meekly and how sweetly she bears it all ! never a murmur or a regret. The crown that the Lord hath promised to them that endure seems already to rest upon her head !

‘It is a long trial of watching and of weeping I have had —no words can tell it ; but the trial is precious, the comfort abounds, and even in the lowest depths I have realized the infinitude of His love . . .

‘Our services are increasingly cheering, though the seed is sown in many tears.’

Sometimes in the silent night there would be the sad plaint heard: ““Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and wilt Thou take Benjamin away ?”’

To THE CONGREGATION AT NEWINGTON.

‘San Remo, 9th January 1877.

‘ My dear Friends,—Though far separated from you by distance, I feel very near to you in heart. Since we parted, not a day has passed without many tender thoughts of home ; and I have “dragged at each remove a lengthening chain,” which binds me to you all. You seem to gather round me in invisible remembrance, specially when we are, as I trust, together “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” and still more specially, when at the Lord’s table you are receiving the

symbols of His sacrifice from His own pierced hand. I expect that this will be read to you ere you leave the sacramental table on Sabbath first. I have so arranged that, as near as possible to the same hour, we shall be celebrating the sacred Supper here. Is it not a fitting season for opening our hearts to each other, when my prayers are so much with you, as I feel certain yours will be with me? The same Christ in many souls, giving them a holy sympathy and oneness, knitting us together by the interchange of loving thoughts, and by many an intertwining thread of mutual intercession—is not *this* communion? is not *this* truly “fellowship one with another? and the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” While He is making it to you a scene of soul enrichment, He will also, of His great liberality, send from His royal table a portion of meat in due season to us who are afar off in this “dry and thirsty land.” I “remember” you “from the land of Jordan and the Hermonites,” when “deep calleth unto deep.” My longing heart flies over land and sea to meet the old familiar faces. When my spirit is overwhelmed within me, “He knoweth the way that I take.” My times are wholly in His hand; where could we better wish them to be than in the hand that was nailed to the cross for us! So, let us leave our burdens at His feet, and take a song away, falling in with the feelings of David when he left the altar and the ark behind—“If the Lord will, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His holy habitation; but if not, here am I, let Him do with me (and mine) what seemeth to Him good?”

‘Oh, let none of us think very hard thoughts of God, because of all that has befallen us. I “set to my seal”

that “He is faithful who hath promised ;” that there are no wounds which the unctions of His gospel cannot heal—no burdens which He does not strengthen us to bear.

‘On the bygone and buried year do we not inscribe this epitaph, “*Not one* good thing hath failed of all that the Lord hath spoken.” Even during the three past months, how many breaks death has made in the group that used to encompass our communion table ! I seem to meet there the moistened eyes of many a mourner for the dead.

‘Nothing has added so much to my own affliction as the impossibility of visiting the sick and the sorrowing in theirs ; that I have not been permitted to accompany the dying to that ship which knows no return. But if they have sailed away to be with Christ—for the very change we are deplored, they are giving thanks before the throne.

“Glory, glory, how the angels sing !” but there are notes which no angel can reach, struck from the harps of those dear ones who have gone up from your side and mine, to “walk in white,” because “washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

‘Living, as we do, in a world where faces are continually changing beneath the awful shadow, well may you and I rejoice together in the permanency of the grand springs of spiritual life, those blessed truths which centre in and circle round the cross. These are the sure, the supreme (may I not say, the only) realities ; and the longer we look at them, are we not filled with a calm and satisfying gladness ? Let us help each other to make this the one thing we desire of the Lord and seek after—a firmer trust and a closer walk—a warmer heart and a louder song.

‘It has been, and is, to me matter of deep gratitude to

God that you as a flock are left in no respect as sheep without a shepherd, since the ministry of the word and of all pastoral care is so faithfully rendered by my beloved colleague.

‘May he be more and more sustained amid abounding labours, and long may you enjoy, at his lips, the mingled sound of the shepherd’s voice and the watchman’s warning !

‘Most cordially do I desire the best of blessings for the brethren of the session, in their personal and their official characters. May they have reason to joy in beholding *your* order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Let me thank all of you, old and young, who have favoured me with letters and messages of kindness. Many of these have had no echo or answer, because my hand is too helpless for much letter-writing, and I have had to limit my letters to such of you as are peculiarly “companions in tribulation,” suffering the sorrows of bereaved affection. Yet on all of you alike may the broadest benediction come down, and be felt in growing comforts and graces, in all your hearts and homes ! It is the sweetest balance to my spirit to think of your “conversation being such as becometh the gospel of Christ,” “that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel,”—shining “as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life.” It is not *you* that are to shine—it is your **LIGHT**. “Let your *light* so shine before men ;” all considerations of self being absorbed in the one grand life-purpose—of “glorifying our Father who is in heaven.” The seraphim before His throne, each with six wings, use two of them for service, but four for humility. If self be very low,

and the Saviour very high, then shall the joy of both your ministers be fulfilled, and the church among you will be sure to be the fitting home for the new life—the place of freedom and brotherly confidence, and all the truest and tenderest concords—combining all the varieties of Christian growth, the winningness of Christian childhood, and the enthusiasm of Christian youth; the vigour of Christian manhood, and the ripe experiences of Christian old age.

‘As our custom used to be at communion times, may I offer you a motto-text to take away with you from the table (1 Thess. ii. 17): “We, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For YE ARE our glory and joy.”

‘Yes, your salvation, YOURS, is not merely the measure, but in a very solemn sense the substance, of the “prize” for which we run.

‘And we long to see the year that has now opened the richest in spiritual life among you—a year in which you will realize more abiding “peace in believing,” and so give forth more visible graciousness, and abound in more loving service.

‘It is no small consolation to me to know that the various institutions and works of usefulness, which are the life of a congregation, continue to prosper well. With the New Year, may there be a new start in them all, as from a higher platform, so that yours may be the encomium of Christ’s own Epistle to the Church of Thyatira (the Church of progress among the seven): “I know thy works,

. . . *and thy works*, and the last to be more than the first.”

‘Did He rebuke the two sons of Zebedee for setting their hearts on the highest positions—“the right hand and the left in His kingdom”? No, He did not *rebuke* them for such legitimate and noble ambition, though He *warned* them of the only terms on which such dignities could be theirs,—a cup and a baptism—a cup of many bitter tears, and a baptism into seas of sorrow.

‘This earth, with all its sorrows, is our training school for that heaven where “His servants shall serve Him.” There is one service needful in this school, which will never come again! Think of it, fellow-suffering believer, and say, Never again, to all eternity, shall I have an opportunity of glorifying God in the service of suffering.”

‘“Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.”

‘I understand Mr. Young has been keeping you regularly informed as to the work I have on hand here, so that you may be guided in your intercessions on its behalf.

‘I wish I had time left to tell you how immensely and intensely interesting that work is! And how urgent is the need of it in the face of such abject superstitious beliefs on the one hand, and such educated unbelief on the other! For greatly do I fear that Italy, dispossessed in some degree, and for the time, of one unclean spirit, is, from among the demons of infidelity, taking back seven other spirits, more wicked still! What can save it, but the replenishment and filling of the empty house with the pure “gospel of the

grace of God"? The only way to preach error down, is to preach up "the truth as it is in Jesus."

'Even the religiousness which is around us here appears to be mainly that which fascinates the senses, and imposes on the imagination, by means of pictures and music, and masses and mummery, and material altars and gorgeous rituals, etc. "YE have not so learned Christ."

'Oh, clasp closer to you hearts your precious Bible, and the simple gospel that saves your souls! Cease not to pray that the old blood-red banner of the cross, which, in apostolic days, wrought such wonders in this land, may be borne aloft and to the forefront *now*; that Protestant Churches here, feeble as yet, but steadily growing, may push their peaceful conquests, persuaded that Christ's truth must win, that Christ's life must spread, that Christ's name must be magnified, and Christ's kingdom come! Hasten that triumph! God of mercy!

'And you, dearly beloved *lambs of the flock*, you are not forgotten in the services we have for the Italian children. How it would touch you and melt you to tears to hear them singing (as we have tried to teach them in their own language) your own familiar Sabbath-school hymns, and to your own favourite tunes: "Just as I am, without one plea;" "Jesus loves me, this I know;" "Safe in the arms of Jesus." In these arms, my dear, dear friends, old and young, may you all be safe, you and your children. Ten thousand blessings ever rest on you!—So wishes, so prays, your affectionate pastor,

J. R.'

The tender life Mr. Robertson was anxiously watching was evidently fading away. His brother, the

Rev. Dr. Robertson of Irvine, who was at that time living abroad, had joined the sorrowing circle at San Remo, and thus wrote to his sister at home :—

‘The barometer has fallen, and the gentle, sensitive, true, delicate life has fallen with it. The doctor hopes the weather may break up and brighten. If it does not, I am afraid, among its shadows, is stalking around toward us the darkest, for our saintly, darling child. . . . James, as you will understand, is overwhelmed with distress. . . . But he is always ready for his work of preaching. . . .’

When the end came, it was thus told to sorrowing friends at home, by her sister who was with her :—

‘22nd April 1877.

‘Such loveliness in death and dying we never saw, and never shall we forget it.

‘On Saturday morning very early, she took my hand suddenly, and said, “Where are they all? Tell them to come.” They came, and just after, we perceived a sad change. . . . Father quoted some text, when she said, “Tell me, am I going to die?” A little cloud overshadowed her, but just for a moment; then she said very sweetly, “I am going to be with Jesus.”

‘Uncle said, “‘which is far better.’”

‘“Far better,” she echoed, “far better.”

‘“And dear mother,” father continued.

‘“Oh yes,” with such lovely sunshine in her face, “next to Jesus, dear mother.”

‘It was a bright morning, the windows were wide open, and her curtain was up; so she lay looking out on the

beautiful blue sea, but she seemed to be looking far, far beyond.

“Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty,” father said.

“Oh yes,” she said, “and I hope you’ll all come and see Him. Tell Dr. —— to be sure and tell all the people he goes to see to come, and “see the King in His beauty;” and tell all the hotel people, “Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.”

“Then, turning to me, she said, “I would like you to give Joseph my Bible. He liked it, and he’ll maybe keep it for my sake.” . . . “I want to tell you my favourite verse, ‘He loved me, and gave Himself for me.’ I think He’s coming—“Lord Jesus, come quickly, oh, come quickly.” . . .

Looking up into my face, she said, “Are you sure I’m ready?” adding, “I was once very bad, but He redeemed me. Tell all the people at home, and the dear little Sabbath scholars, to come to Jesus now.”

“Yes,” said father, “you came to Him early, and you would like them to do so too.”

“Oh yes, I’m so glad I did, for I never could have done it now.” “Oh, you’ve all been so kind to me;” and with an effort she raised her finger, and pointed to the French nurse, who was in a corner of the room, weeping bitterly.

Louise came forward, and Jessie took her hand and threw her a kiss; but the kind old nurse was not going to be satisfied with that, but came forward and kissed her, amid sobs and tears.

“Oh, to ‘steal away to Jesus, to steal away home,’ ” she said in a whisper.

Uncle William, who was accustomed to bring her, each morning, a glass of fresh spring water, which she greatly

relished, repeated the words, “The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water.”

‘Looking up to him, she said, “I’ll not need you then.”

‘Then she fell back, saying, “Now I’m tired ; good-night, good-night.”

• • • • •

‘What a testimony that was, during all that solemn forenoon, and indeed during all those hours of passing away, that spoke louder than the grandest sermon !

‘This morning when we were all around her, Uncle said, “What a bright Sabbath morning !”

‘“Is it Sabbath morning ?” she asked ; “I did not remember. What a bad memory I have !”

‘“Yes, dear, it is, and it’s a long time now since you’ve been at church.”

‘“Perhaps I’ll be there before you to-day, ‘to the general assembly and Church of the first-born,’ ” she replied.

‘And so it was.

‘The gates of the upper sanctuary opened, and she entered in.’

Her father wrote :—

‘I never saw “Triumph in Christ” such as we have been witnessing in the departure of our darling. It has been . . . heaven begun below. . . . All through Saturday, and on through the night, she lay in the extremity of weakness, yet glorying in the cross, and most vividly remembering you all. . . .

‘Her messages to her class, and the young people of the congregation, were overpoweringly tender. . . .

‘When I had said—

“ ‘Oh, to be over yonder,  
In that world of wonder !  
There’s no more shadow yonder  
*In the presence of the King ;*’”

‘Instantly her face brightened as if a heavenly light were dawning, and with the sweetest smile she passed away.

‘Fond love to you all from a bleeding heart.’

‘So young, so lovely, so full of promise’ (wrote a sympathizing friend to her father), ‘so fitted for usefulness, and for a mission to brighten your pilgrimage and that of many others—it is very hard to resign her.’

Yes, very hard.

And ‘mother earth received on trust’—on trust only—one more cherished treasure, on 24th April, the day on which, in the year before, the hand of death was laid so suddenly on her eldest sister.

And her father says:—

‘From that little narrow grave, in the corner of that foreign cemetery, between the rustling of the olives and the sounding of the sea, there streams upward a bright pathway of sure and certain hope to the throne of Jesus, and to the glory that fadeth not away.’

Dr. Robertson again wrote to his sister:—

‘Fiesole, Toscano.

‘. . . How intensely I came to love that lovely Jessie, who, I think, was the sweetest child that ever needed to be saved ! . . . How nobly James bore himself as it drew nearer

the end, and noblest of all at the last! When he was no longer distracted by possibilities of recovery, and the melancholy sound of that broken cough that echoed down the corridors all through the night—the saddest music I ever listened to—when he knew it had ceased in the silence out of which rises the New Song, when he saw it was not possible the cup could pass from him, he said, "Thy will be done," and set his face stedfastly and even cheerfully to the rest. He was so ill when she was not so ill, that there seemed no way of outgoing for him at the end except either to go down altogether, as he feared he would, or to rise, as he did, upon the other side into the full majesty and dignity of Christian grief. And that he did, with not a little in it of the truly sublime. We glorified God in him also. . . . You will help to keep him up, as his *work* too so wonderfully does . . .'

With stores of unwritten and tender memory regarding those days, so sad to them—'yet to her so evidently happy'—the mourners, after depositing the precious seed, turned their faces homewards.

The season for ministerial work at San Remo was over.

## CHAPTER X V.

### *Eventide.*

1877-1878.

MR. ROBERTSON was now in a shattered state of health, and, after reaching London, tarried there several weeks, on his way north ; thus putting off the sad home-going till he was more able for it.

He had at this time, we are told, a touching evidence of sympathy from the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Mr. Spurgeon had met with them at San Remo, and been deeply interested in Jessie. On the Sabbath after returning to London, Mr. Robertson went in late, after the sermon had begun, to a back seat in the Tabernacle. Mr. Spurgeon, who notices everything, saw him come in, and immediately turned his sermon into a consolatory strain, and, as Mr. Robertson expressed it, poured out for five minutes the very richest comfort. Mr. Robertson thanked him at the close, and Mr. Spurgeon said, ‘I could not help it when I saw you looking so sad.’

Medical advice was, at first, contrary to his attempting work at home for a time ; but, in the midst of

congenial Christian friends (of whose tender sympathy and kindness we cannot speak too strongly), and in the world-wide interests of the ‘May meetings,’ he found temporary diversion from his sense of loss, till he was sufficiently revived to warrant the same advice in recommending a gradual return to his favourite employment, in the old and well-loved sphere, while forbidding residence at the old home.

He says :—

‘ I had a great deal of happy fellowship in London with some of the holiest and the best out of heaven.

‘ What blessed gatherings ! What blessed greetings before the throne ! How my heart did respond to that sentence in your last, “ Is the heavenly influence our darling Jessie carried about with her to be ours no more, but in memory ? ”

‘ It *was* a mighty influence for good that God gave her. I find on every side the tokens of the blessing she has left behind her. Often still, “ I am, with sore affliction, quite overwhelmed.”

‘ But it is more and more sensibly “swallowed up in victory.”

‘ What special cause we have to be thankful for that *last* Beatitude from the lips of Jesus : “ Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed ! ”

‘ Oh, these sweet, and bright, and ever-remembered faces ! What a morning that will be when we shall see them again, and shall love one another yet with an eternal love !

‘ The light has gone from everything here except the glorious gospel of the blessed God.’

To Mr. M'Dowall, then very feeble, and little able to write :—

‘ 4th December 1877.

‘ . . . Only just now has your precious letter reached me—precious to me as coming from you, and still more so, as a token of the loving confidence that has blessed all our days. It is very sweet to me in the midst of my sore adversities, of which I understand you have been told, and more of which I may be able to tell you some day soon, when I can get to your side.

‘ . . . I can only add the reassurance of fervent and most grateful affection. Let us “stay ourselves on our God”—the best of all consolations, connecting us with those who have gone before, and conveying us toward them in heart and aim.’

After Mr. Robertson’s death, a friend quoted the following incident, as told to him by Mr. Robertson.

‘ A few days ago, I was walking along the road, and came upon a poor blind boy, sitting at the roadside, flying a kite.

‘ I said to him, “ My boy, what are *you* doing flying a kite ? You cannot see it.”

‘ Turning his blind eyes up towards me, he replied, “ No, I canna see it, but I can feel it tuggin’.” ’

Mr. Robertson added, ‘ I am like the little blind laddie. I feel something tuggin’, and by and by I’ll see them all again.’

To a niece:—

‘ December 1877.

‘ . . . Sending to-day a device of dear M.’s for our darling Jessie’s tombstone—an open Bible, with a dove hovering over it, and under the name, on the one open page, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” in Italian; and on the other, in English, “Jesus only.” “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.”’

‘ Never can my heart cease to bleed and linger yonder,’ he says, some months later.

Another friend tells us that—

‘ Mr. Robertson’s visits to the Cripples’ Home in Salisbury Place were much enjoyed by the children. He used to give them simple texts. The older children got one for each finger, which they were to try and repeat to him on his next visit. One day a friend called, and of their own accord the children went through the exercise of repeating the texts. The last to do this was a quiet, intelligent boy who had lost his hand. He held up the stump of his arm, and said, “As I have no fingers, Mr. Robertson gave me a big text for this—he said it was so big that it could cover all my sins;” and the boy repeated the words, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

‘ The young sufferers longed for his visits. Whenever they saw him passing along the street, they hastened to the windows and clapped their hands, and if he went on they were disappointed and silent, but if he turned in they shouted for joy. Every Sabbath morning as he passed to

church they were watching for him, and whenever he came in sight their sweet voices at once joined in the hymn—

““O that will be joyful,  
When we meet to part no more.”

Mr. Robertson would stand still for a few moments, his heart would fill, and then he would hasten away to his loved work, with the notes of the children’s song following him and cheering him in both his “doing and suffering,” as the children’s Hosanna did the Master in His.’

The tie to the little sufferers was all the stronger now that Eliza and Jessie had been frequent visitors, carrying their gentle, natural, easy cheer to them.

Having returned to Glasgow, Mr. Robertson remained with his friends there, going to Edinburgh as strength allowed, to discharge his ministerial work, with the hope—ardently cherished—of being able to resume residence when more fit for it.

Under some ‘aggravations of personal suffering,’ he was, however, for the time being ‘medically interdicted’ from such residence, and, in the end, ‘had no choice left him but that of withdrawing from the more regular and active duties and responsibilities of the pastorate.’ This partial retirement was a heavy trial—the climax of his sorrows.

He had ‘been bereaved of his children—bereft of his work, he *was* bereaved.’ Still, there was some alleviation, as he said, in ‘the hope that, during the remainder of my sadly-darkened days, I may, by God’s continued

mercy, be able yet to seek the good of that people to whom my whole heart clings, and who have been the object of my constant care and love, ever since they were first brought together as a new congregation.'

Still he sought 'the strength to suffer, and the will to serve ;' in all that came to him, was not 'our Father's will the perfection of all reasons ? When the thorns rankle in the flesh, the more is grace poured into the soul. The hotter the furnace, the more bright and beautiful the presence of the Son of God.'

His brethren of the Presbytery, as well as all who spoke at the congregational meeting called to consider his resignation, uttered their sympathies very tenderly, with great affection and regard.

Nor was his cup of sorrow yet full.

In the midst of all these anxieties, he had been passing to and from the sick-bed of a dear sister, whose gentle life was ebbing to its close ; and who, among the last days of the year, went quietly home to join those 'gone before.'

We give some of the notes written during his sister's illness in 1877, and on to the time of her death :—

‘ 3rd September 1877.

‘ My very dear I.,— . . . May you be guarded, delivered, and blessed every hour ! Why should we ever doubt that our Heavenly Father has a personal affection and care for these bodies as well as these souls of ours ! I believe that if that thin veil which separates the two worlds were drawn

aside just now, we would see such a look on His face that we would never doubt again. And though there be those on earth who love us, and of whose sympathy we feel quite sure, yet *far* more tenderly and devotedly does He love us, putting our “tears into His bottle, and our sighs into His book.”

‘15th November.

‘ . . . I hope to find you suffering less when I come, and kept very close to the fountain of Love. How gracious our God is to permit us to give and to receive kindnesses !

‘ Is not His love like the centre of gravity in the material world—not only attracting all things to itself, but uniting them harmoniously to each other ? ’

‘ “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Is it not comforting to think of Jesus under this character ? Here He is come to sit over you as a Refiner—one who was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” who knows all the bitterness of the saddest heart. . . .’

‘ “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” Christ *can* give to the most sorrowful such joy unspeakable, and *He gives it* by making known to the soul what He has done, and by showing to the soul what He is still. These are the things spoken of from which our joy flows. His voice, drawing our thoughts to Himself, is that which brings healing to our wounds.

‘ “These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace.” What He has told us of His salvation, and the love shown to us in providing it all—these are the things applied by the Comforter. These are the springs of

comfort which, like the snows of Lebanon, are so high that nothing can ever dry them up! . . .'

“ ‘ God commendeth His love ” in this, “ that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

“ ‘ He hath made Him to be sin for us, that we might be made ” not merely righteous, but *righteousness*—and “ *the righteousness of God* in Him.”

“ ‘ Jesus, how glorious is Thy grace !  
When in Thy name we trust,  
Our faith receives a righteousness  
That makes the sinner just.” ’

‘ 24th November.

‘ I want to tell you of a little boy of a friend of mine, who was returning home the other night with his father by some bye-paths that were utterly unknown to the child, and, after wonderings and questionings, he at last gripped his father’s hand fast in the dark, and said, “ I know nothing at all about this road, except that we are going home ; ” and then he added, “ You’ll tell me all about it when we get there.” I thought this is a picture of simple trust in our Best Friend, and of what it is to let Him lead us on in the pure night of faith.

‘ I was greatly struck with that when I was beside the sick-bed of old Professor Duncan. He was a thinker that could wade knee-deep in waters that drowned other people, and all his life he had perplexed himself with metaphysical subtleties. Yet at the end he used to say, he found himself back at his mother’s knee, receiving the gospel—the grace of Jesus—the kingdom of heaven—as a little child.

‘ His deep thinking had done nothing to clear his way to the unknown world.

‘ Words often on his lips were—

‘ “ Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

‘ He held fast his *first* hope as his *last* hope firm to the end.

‘ God puts us down into very dark places to learn the lesson of hope—“Good hope through grace.” It is a lesson generally learned in a strange school—“the valley of Achor for a door of hope”—the low places of trouble opening the happy vistas which run up and up to the throne of God. Jesus is our Hope. We turn to our stronghold as “prisoners of hope.” “May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.”’

‘ 30th November.

‘ May I offer you one or two of the healing leaves of the tree of life ?

‘ Isa. liii. 5 : “ The chastisement of our peace was on Him, and with His stripes we are healed.”

‘ Mark v. 34: “ Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole.” She had tremblingly touched only the hem of His garment. There was no merit in the act itself. Her healing was the result of believing that Jesus was full to the brim with healing virtue.

‘ “ By grace”—not grace *within* us, but grace *without* us—“ye are saved.” . . .

‘ A negro convert said, “I know now what free grace means—something for nothing.” . . .

‘ Yes, it is given freely, without anything in us, or done by us, or felt by us, or spoken by us, or possessed by us—“ without money, and without price.” This is the “ strength to the poor—a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat.” May the good Lord breathe on you His own most blessed peace.’

‘ 4th December.

‘ Another drop of Bible balm—

‘ Eph. i. 6: “ To the praise of the glory of His grace . . . accepted in the Beloved.”

‘ This is the Rock that never moves—

‘ *Christ*

‘ In the glory of His person,

‘ The love of His heart,

‘ The power of His arm.

‘ “ Weaker now—a bruised reed—  
Help I every moment need.”

‘ “ The bruised reed He will not break.”

‘ “ The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath (at our lowest—at our worst) are the Everlasting Arms.” ’

‘ 11th December.

‘ Will you, dear J., drop these words betimes into our beloved sister’s dying ear ?

‘ “ I will make mention of His righteousness, even of *His only*.”

‘ “ Had I an angel’s righteousness,  
I’d lay aside that glorious dress  
And wrap me up in Christ.”

“ Thy righteousness  
 Shall be my marriage dress,  
 In which I'll stand  
 At God's right hand,  
 Forgiven.  
 And enter rest,  
 Among the blest,  
 In heaven.”

“ My righteousness shall *never* be abolished, and my salvation shall be for ever.”

16th December.

“ Grateful for your tidings of the dear patient sufferer. Most tenderly are you both remembered.

“ The river of God is *full* of water.”

“ Our emptiness is but another name for our capacity of being filled. . . .

“ May God Himself fill you with all strength and comfort. . . . They cast out their “ anchors from the stern, and wished for the day.” But when the morning broke God's love was high above the storm. Our Anchor is ever drawing us home—drawing us to itself—not downwards, beneath devouring waves, but upwards to unending joys.

“ When the shore is won at last,  
 Who will count the billows past? ”

In the Train, 18th December.

“ I cannot keep from going on talking with you. It was a sore wrench to tear myself off to-day. Do let me hear by every post if you can. We will poise our hearts on the thought, “ *Thou* art with me.”

“ Bound in the bundle of life.”

“ Who then can e'er divide us more  
 From Jesus and His love? ”

‘19th December.

‘Will you give her this word? “*I live* by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

‘What is life? *Union* with *Life*.

‘How safe, how restful, how blessed the life that is a part of Christ’s life! *Cut off* from the guilty past by His blood, and having only to *live* in the present and in the future. No death to the believer—it is all swallowed up. Even *it* is life! As at the end of the 23rd Psalm, there is no death at all. It is leaped over, or left out, as about a thing which is not!

‘“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;” and then without a break, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

‘Is not Bunyan right in making “the valley of the shadow” come long before the end—a time of distress done away with before crossing the river?

‘May I add these few words for *her*, as she is able to take them in?

‘“Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion;” and this other, “Happy is he who hath the Lord Jehovah for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.”

‘Sin “cast into the depths of the sea,”

‘“Nailed to the cross,”

‘“Blotted out” for ever,

‘To be “remembered no more;”

‘Yes, “remembered no more.”’

‘20th December.

‘Will you assure her most tenderly that we are constantly asking for her that she may be feeling her Father’s arm,

seeing her Father's smile, resting on her Father's bosom. No sorrow can visit us but it has been in the heart of Jesus first: “*I have prayed* for thee that thy faith fail not.”

‘In Him our sins and sorrows die, but the love, the joy live on for ever. I am trying to comfort myself with these words, “He will not fail *you*, nor forsake you.”’

‘We are sharing our cross with Jesus, my dear —. It will never crush us, nor kill us, when we keep close to Him.’

‘The Lord be your stay in this time of sore need. And He will be so. He would have us depend on Him for each thing we need, *as* we need it, knowing we are not to be trusted with the keys. The supply is always ready for the demand, and our great need the sure warrant for receiving. We are brought into this crushed, ground-down state of heavy woe, that we may trust in God, who raiseth the dead. Our pitiful Father is not so straitened in His understanding of our frame, as to require *words* from us to tell Him what we feel and fear. He sees and knows *our whole state* to be a prayer.’

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Mr. Robertson’s people, while ‘welcoming’ any service he could render them, and ‘desiring’ his frequent presence among them, were willing to ‘reckon these as not obligatory, but voluntary;’ and further, ‘left him unconditionally free to accept any temporary engagement, which his health might permit, for render-

ing useful service to the cause of Christ at home or abroad.'

In accordance with this agreement, he wrote soon after, 'Much more preaching work pressing in upon me than I can overtake.'

The Lord had a wider field of usefulness in store for him; and the two last years of his life became years of happiest service, while he went from place to place, sowing the seed everywhere.

A brother in the ministry, who spoke to him of the change, and expressed his sympathy with him in the trial it involved, remarked, in a semi-jocular way, that he 'was retiring into public life;' and then, in sober earnest, added, 'I think it very likely that this is God's way of extending your usefulness.' His testimony after Mr. Robertson's death was: 'Those who have been most observant of his course during these last two years, and have known the extent and variety of his labours, will be almost disposed to say, I "did certainly divine;" and when God "writeth up the people," I think it not unlikely that these two years will be found to have been as fruitful as—perhaps more fruitful than—any other two years of a ministry which has been greatly blessed.'

Opportunities were being constantly used. The habits, fostered at home and at Tillicoultry, of steady, conscientious, hard work had become the life of habitual labour—a life in which self-indulgence was left out of account to the very end.

There was no disposition towards easy-chair Christianity at any period. If this was the case in earlier days, still more so was it after passing through his 'great tribulation.' 'He sought relief—as he always found pleasure—in his work.' Wherever he went, as far as his powers allowed him, he continued, as constantly and self-forgetfully as ever, to carry out his Master's great commission: 'Preach the gospel to every creature.' In railway train, in car, or on the road, he had a word for every one. To miss a friend on whom he was calling was a disappointment, but it was taken as an occasion given to speak to the one who opened the door. After he was gone, countless instances came to light of his being ever thus 'about his Father's business,' and some entire strangers, to whom he had spoken, called to seek further counsel, not having heard of his departure.

On going out to preach on any occasion, his last words to those left at home often were: 'Good-bye—"prophesy to the wind."

About his evangelistic work he says:—

' 26th July 1878.

' Going to Inverness with Dr. Andrew Bonar, for a series of joint services. Pray much for us. Have had a great deal of blessed work in the North. "The Lord is good." "A safe stronghold."

' Preaching nearly every day—some twenty-six times of it since coming, three weeks ago. It *is* a precious balm !'

We are indebted to the Rev. Dr. Andrew Bonar, Glasgow, for the following reminiscences :—

‘He was ever watching, specially the last years of his life, to get the truth lodged in the heart of those he met.

‘A young friend was coming along Granville Street, Glasgow, while he was on the other side. He crossed over, and kindly stopped his young friend, asking, “Well, what was your text to-day?” No answer being given, he said, “I’ll give you one to-day, and, the next time we meet, you’ll have one for me.”’

‘On a Sabbath evening, walking along Kent Road, he found two young women talking together. Standing still, he asked, “Are there two of you, or three?” They did not seem to understand his question, so he said again, “Are there only two, or is there a third with you, as there was with the two going to Emmaus?”

‘Their reply was: “We were not talking of Him just now, but we were talking of one whom we would like to see brought to Him.”

‘He at once rejoined, “Oh then, He’ll count that the same as if your conversation had been about Himself.”’

‘He said one day, “A young, loving, lively Christian carries ozone with her wherever she goes. She makes the air sweet about her.”’

‘It was rather a favourite saying of his: “Our lives should be benedictions to men, and doxologies to God.”’

‘He used to tell of an aged Christian, who was near the close of his pilgrimage, and seemingly unconscious, and to whom a friend was one day quoting the passage (thus): “I know *in* whom I have believed, etc.” The old disciple

would not accept it so, but broke in with: “That’s not it. It’s ‘*I know whom.*’ I cannot allow even a preposition to come between me and my Saviour.”’

‘In this connection Mr. Robertson spoke of nearness to the Saviour at all times: “It will make our work worship, and our service song; our whole life a liturgy of thanksgiving, and all our habits holiness to the Lord.”’

‘At the Lord’s table, one Sabbath, pointing to the broken bread and the poured-out wine, his words were: “He Himself is the Preacher now. That white-covered table is His pulpit, anguish His argument, blood His eloquence.”’

‘Frequently he brought out much meaning from a text by a single touch. “‘*I am black*’ (Cant. i. 5). Yes, this is the autobiography of every believer.”’

‘How strong was his language regarding the *doctrine of substitution*! “Low thoughts of this truth lie at the root of all our low religion. In these times many talk of it with bated breath. They tell us that kindness is the key to the human heart. They forget that there is another door, *conscience*, for which even kindness has no key. ‘Behold the fire and the wood, but *where is the Lamb?*’”

‘He spoke of this great doctrine as “the royal chariot in which the spirit of revival loves to ride.”’

‘Occasionally in quiet conversation together, when the subject had warmed our hearts, he would suddenly pass into prayer, nor was there any abruptness in the transition.’

‘He excelled in addressing a workers’ meeting, or a noon-day prayer-meeting. He did not prolong his address, but always left something fresh and memorable. One day, at one of these meetings, he opened his Bible at Ezek. xlvi. 1, and called our attention to the circumstance that

‘the waters came down from the temple, at the south side of *the altar*. That river is going forth to heal and to fertilize ; but, as it is flowing forth to us *sinners*, you see it first *asks permission of the altar*.’’

‘Another time : “Pardon is not a deed of love done when God’s other attributes are asleep. No ; all God’s attributes stand round the altar, giving consent.”’

‘In the closing period of his life and work, it pleased the Lord to visit his servant with repeated bereavements, each of which he felt most keenly. But the effect of these trials was apparent to all who knew him. Under them he became more tender, and not merely more subdued. He reminded me of Zeph. iii. 2, by contrast ; for he “received correction,”—bowing before Him who laid His holy hand upon him—and he “drew near to his God.”’

One minister, the Rev. Gavin S. Muir, formerly of Grange, Banffshire, and now of Slateford, who, with his people, shared in the ministrations of Mr. Robertson’s visit to the north already referred to, says :—

‘It was in July 1878 I asked him to help at our summer communion, and to hold some evangelistic meetings afterwards. There had been no such meetings in the district before, and I was desirous that Mr. Robertson should be the first evangelist heard by the people, as I knew he would produce on their minds a favourable impression, as to the possibilities of good in such services. I was not disappointed. Night after night, in increasing numbers, and from remoter distances, they came to hear “the old, old story,” from his lips. No immediate cases of conversion were visible, but

more than one, afterwards brought in, traced first impressions to that hallowed season.

‘What struck me most about his preaching was its “happy Scripturalness.” He sent away the people with the impression, “I never knew there was so much in the Bible on that subject before. I must now study it for myself.”

‘And is not this the best kind of teaching? What produces no mere passing impression, but sends the hearers home to think for themselves? Certainly it is. Would we had more of it!

‘Of his society and influence in private, I need not speak. Any who once enjoyed it longed to enjoy and benefit by it again. While with us he seemed literally to feed upon the Word of God. It was truly to him “more than his necessary food.” He was constantly digging in the Bible as for hid treasure, and whenever he found a golden text, or silver thought, he did not hoard it, but put it into circulation at once. He had the “evangelistic gift” most decidedly, and he seemed to feel that the “breaking up of his home nest” had been lovingly meant by God to set him free for labours congenial to his desires and qualifications.

‘May his mantle fall on others, and may the Church soon have many such gifted preachers, “going about doing good,” gathering in precious souls, and handing them over to the pastors to feed and build up in their most holy faith.’

Mr. Young says:—

‘I had many opportunities of talking with him, as to his work among the Churches. His diagnosis of the spiritual condition of various parts of the country, and the information he gained as to the needs of the people,

and the means employed to meet them, would have been of great value, had he put them in writing. I remember how earnestly he talked of the great good done by some of our ministers in quiet country places—remote corners, little known to the Church; and the necessity of maintaining small congregations, even where others might be quite near.

‘His own spirit was much refreshed by his visits to country manses, and talks with brethren in the ministry doing difficult work. In the last conversation I had with him before his death, he said to me: “Had I known how much service might be rendered to such brethren and their congregations, and what a field of work was open to me, I would have asked the Presbytery, ten years ago, to loose me from my congregation, and make me a minister at large.”

‘During these years, he appeared, in different circumstances, two different men. Alone, or with friends who talked of his trials, he seemed broken down, overburdened with sorrow. But once out of his room, on a platform, or in midst of work, he renewed his youth, and was as joyous and bright as ever. It was a feature of his character, that he gave himself to one thing at a time, and became absorbed, for the time being, in the one thing. Hence it was of great blessing to him, in his later days, to be drawn hither and thither, to new fields of labour, which engrossed him, and, for a little, lifted him out of himself.’

A tie was now to be broken, involving the severance of an almost life-long friendship, and in reference to this Mr. Robertson writes:—

‘August 1878.

‘. . . I have no doubt he will be kept in untroubled calm, under the sunshine of a light that never shone on earth or sea; and only when Jesus pleases, there will come the Everlasting Light, and the ceaseless rapture of the immortals! My fondest love to him, with the words, “A stronghold in the day of trouble.” “He knoweth them that trust in Him.”

‘. . . “The Comforter” is with you; “kept by the power of God.” He gives patience and quietness, according to His will—sweet and precious fruit, even in old age.

‘Is it not the land of Beulah on the verge of the river? So near the celestial city that you hear the songs of the shining ones? It is blessed to put down a Q.E.D. at the end of the problem of life: “To *show* that the Lord is upright”—that He has kept His promises. “He *is* a Rock, the Rock of my defence—a *dwelling*-Rock.”’

Then came the last visit; but he, whose delight on seeing him, on previous occasions, seemed likely to prove too much for the frail and failing tabernacle, was now deaf to the words that used to charm, and unable to respond any more to human friendship.

Mr. Robertson led the thoughts of a sorrowing group, gathered on the scene of the departure, in the glad testimony to truth revealed and believed: “He asked *life* of Thee, and Thou gavest it him”—in this room—“even length of days for ever and ever.”’

A few days more, and, referring to the words he had heard sung—with difficulty, and amid tears—at

his friend's grave, he wrote from London, on his way to some evangelistic work in Paris:—

‘ 20th September 1878.

‘ . . . “Asleep in Jesus.” That strain is in my ear continually. It links the two worlds—the happy present with the happy future—the mystic power of an endless life. . . .

‘ You will be enclosed in the cleft of the Rock, and will see the shadow as it passes. *He* will be your arm every morning, on which leaning you cannot faint. He will feed you with such hidden manna, and make you so strong, that the burden will feel light to you. He will take up both you and your burden, as the shepherd carries the lamb on his shoulders; and will bear you unscathed over all the rough places. I know He will do it, in His own wise, holy, perfect way—faithfully, abundantly.’

Of his Paris work he wrote afterwards:—

‘ Clapham, 12th October 1878.

‘ Have had much enjoyment in fellowship with some remarkable men—Père Hyacinthe, M. Bersier, Canon Bell, etc. etc. Time would fail to tell of all the delight I had in the gospel work of—not Sabbaths only, but—every day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A short, characteristic, and interesting account, from his own pen, of the gospel work which Mr. Robertson saw, and in which he was engaged, in Paris, appeared in the United Presbyterian *Missionary Record* of 1st May 1879, and was afterwards issued in a separate form by Mr. Elliot, Princes Street, Edinburgh. In it he speaks of the Salle Evangelique as ‘a scene of sanctified delight,’ in which ‘we learned to love, not our own regiment the less, but the great army more—declaring and increasing the unity of our minds and hearts, as those

‘Twenty-one times I had of it in fourteen days. Yet no harm have I felt; it was all so cheering.

‘Avidity for the truth is wonderful. It has made my broken bones rejoice, and has turned my valley of weeping into a door of hope for France.

‘M’All’s work, Miss de Broen’s, and Miss Leigh’s—all very precious. Held meeting with the *employés* of the Exhibition, was entreated to continue, but other engagements hold me. Dr. M’Ewan’s anniversary to-morrow; same service in Melrose next Sabbath; Newington, 27th; Dr. Frew’s, first Sabbath November; then Glasgow, Dumfries, Aberdeen, Banff, Liverpool, etc.’

‘8th November.

‘The gatherings at Dr. Frew’s were large. Among them, not a few who were scholars in Saturday and Sabbath classes, in the old Greenhill days; and in after conversation there were some touching proofs of precious fruit from that early sowing.’

who have a common Father, a common hope, and a common home.’

‘On reading this sketch,’ says a ministerial brother, ‘one is ready to notice these three things: 1. What a golden pen Mr. Robertson wrote with; 2. with what Christian affection he regarded all who were working in the service of the same Lord; and 3. how cheerfully he lent himself, “in season and out of season,” to promote the cause that was dear to him.’

## C H A P T E R X V I.

*Home.*

1879.

CONTRARY as it was, and repulsive, to Mr. Robertson's nature, to plan for an easy way of doing his work, yet, in his wanderings now, he found it absolutely necessary to take all precautions to avoid fatigue in walking.

In a letter to a friend, from Edinburgh, he says :—

‘ 17th January 1879.

‘ . . . I write in bed, and with difficulty. I never expected to see you again on this side the river! . . .

‘ Seized here, during Tuesday night, with the most terrible of the paroxysms I have ever had—heart at the bursting, protracted agony for breath, then sinking into insensibility for four or five hours.<sup>1</sup>

‘ Yet the Rock did not fail me—did not tremble.

‘ And the shadow has been turned once more.

‘ The doctors speak of it as a very narrow escape. Praise for the reign of superabounding grace.

‘ I had communion work here on the Sabbath, and anniversary meeting on the Monday evening, visiting of sick on Tuesday, when this spasmody attack suddenly came at midnight.

<sup>1</sup> He had similar seizures repeatedly before, but this was much worse than any previous one.

‘ . . . Many a promise, written in sympathetic ink, we cannot read, till the fire of trouble brings out the characters. The farther we go down the shaft of affliction, the deeper are we led into the gold mines of spiritual experience.

‘ . . . If Jesus seems to sleep in our vessel, He sleeps with His hand on the helm, and will steer us homeward.

‘ My heart is like a ploughed field—cross-ploughed. Not one good thing has failed—not one single lock of which he has not the key. You and dear —— will keep praying that we may be enabled to sing, like the nightingale, in the night, and when the thorns are at our breast.’

During the illness referred to, he was in the house of two of his oldest and most valued friends, who nursed him with all tenderness and affection, until he was able to return to Glasgow ; but some time passed, after this seizure, before he was fit for work again ; and it proved to be what he thought it—though those whose lives were closely bound up with his were strongly unwilling so to regard it—a warning of the coming end.

In March he was once more able, though not very strong, to venture from home on his much-loved and abundant labours.

Early in May, ‘ he gave one of his genial and interesting addresses to some thousands of young people in the Glasgow City Hall, on the Temperance movement.’

About a month before he died, passing along Princes Street, he shook hands hastily with two friends whom he met, saying, ‘ I would know your voices in heaven.’

Allusion was made to the death of some one in whom they were mutually interested, and he parted, saying, 'Heaven's filling fast !'

His last three Sabbaths were spent in Fife, Aberdeen, and Barrhead. Of his own accord, he offered to spend the week between the first and second, with friends whose homes lay on his way between the two places. Such an offer, being only too rare, was joyfully accepted. It was his parting visit. Part of it was spent in the house from which he had chosen his beloved wife. His last walk before leaving was to the churchyard and the grave of his old friend, where he had an evening talk with the few boys who had come to ring the eight o'clock bell in the old church tower—a talk about 'better things,' in no hackneyed phrases, of no threadbare forms, natural, easy—words to which the boys listened attentively, reverently.

In returning, rests had to be taken on the slightest ascents in the way, to ease chest pain; but this had been so often the case, in previous years, that it was no more thought of than usual.

In the calm, quiet, solemn talk with God in family prayer at eventide, among other touching and impressive sayings, these cannot be forgotten :—

‘ “Thou art near, O Lord.” ’

‘ Trouble is near, but Thou art nearer ; ’

‘ Sin is near, but Thou art nearer ; ’

‘ Death, and judgment, and eternity are near, but

Thou art nearer.’

On leaving, there were the kindly parting words to the servants, as usual, in addition to previous talks. 'Good bye, M. Walk with your hand in the pierced hand of the Saviour. . . . Don't look in. Always be looking out.' 'Good-bye, P.; I'll hear all your verses when I come back again.' He had said to her before, 'Will you learn a verse every day, P.? That will be seven verses at the end of a week, you know, and 365 in a year. It's nice to lie down at night with a verse, and to find it on your pillow in the morning, the first thing when you waken.' The learning was begun at once for his sake.

Well for us that we often say our last good-byes without knowing of it! Otherwise how much harder they would be!

After his Sabbath's work in Aberdeen, other claims, unexpected, prolonged his work there for some days. Then a short and often-promised visit was paid at Arbroath, on his return journey to his Glasgow home, which was reached on Friday.

In passing Stirling he turned aside for a few hours, among the scenes and friends of his youth, visiting the old church, which, from association, was ever dear to him, and the little cottages on the Castle Hill, where, in his student days, he had so often comforted the sick and the sorrowful. He called, in his rapid, radiant way, at the house of an old and venerated friend, where he found—what always cheered him—a

gathering of little children. After throwing himself, with all the sympathy of his nature, into their sports for a few minutes, he suddenly paused, and asked the question (and none could more naturally make such a transition), ‘Which of you all loves Jesus most? Is it *you*, May? or *you*, Sissy? or *you*?’ (naming each in turn). ‘There’s an angel in this room, ready to go up with the answer! What will it be, I wonder?’ and after a few words of simple prayer, which the youngest could understand, and ere the children had recovered their surprise, he was off!

‘Twas even as if an angel shook his wings.’

His old friend, when telling the story afterwards, said, ‘Four days later, when the news came that he was taken up, we thought he must just have been the angel himself.’

Saturday, 31st May, found him in Barrhead, leading in prayer, and addressing, more than once, a Christian conference, held there, in the afternoon, ‘with great unction and tenderness.’

We are told by the Rev. W. Clark, that on Sabbath he spoke, in the first part of the forenoon service, from Cant. ii. 8-17, specially to the young, for his ‘heart clung to them,’ and ‘because Jesus said to Peter, “Feed My lambs,” before He said, “Feed My sheep.”’

Describing the whole passage as a ‘basket of silver filled with apples of gold,’ he said, among other things,

that ‘the loving invitation “Come” was like a golden clasp around the Bible.’ On Monday he took away eleven written answers to the questions given out at this service.

His forenoon text (for the whole congregation) was Zech. iii. 9 : ‘I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day ;’ from which he referred to the finished work on Calvary, and to the Pentecostal outpouring afterwards, as the ‘model’ of what God can do, and of what we may expect.

In the intervals after the forenoon and afternoon services, he rested in the vestry, to save the exertion of walking ; but, hearing the sound of children’s voices singing a hymn in the session-house, he was drawn in to say a word to the little ones there, and was found giving them ‘a handful of sweeties, which the more they are sucked the larger they grow, and the more they are given away the more we have to ourselves !’ ‘God is love !’ ‘Christ is all.’ ‘It is finished.’ ‘Look to Him.’ ‘Lovest thou Me ?’

He also addressed a few loving words to the Sabbath school in the church, on the love of Jesus—exhorting scholars to look to the bleeding Lamb, and pointing teachers to the starry crown, graciously held out to His faithful servants.

At the evening service he made some beautiful remarks on the 23rd Psalm, when giving it out to be sung ; and again supplied ‘tender grass for the lambs’ out of Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

His text was 2 Cor. iv. 6 : 'The face of Jesus Christ.'

He began by making a touching allusion to the faces of absent ones. At the close of one sentence he was obliged to pause for a moment, evidently overcome by his feelings, and then proceeded with calmness and steadiness. He referred to the utter unsatisfactoriness of all attempts at portraying the face of Jesus by human skill, and said he would turn the Bible lamp upon that face, and then described it as—

'Marred and mournful,' turning up and reading	Isa. lii. 14.
'Fair and lovely,'	Ps. xlv. 2.
'Once pale and shrouded in death,'	John xx. 7.
'Now bright with glory,'	Rev. i. 13-16.
'A face that may be sought and found by every one, here and now,'	Ps. xxvii. 8.

This was the last of a series of evangelistic services.

At its close, the preacher invited all who could to remain, that he might further address them; and although the service had lasted an hour and three-quarters, such a large number remained, both in the gallery and area, that he continued for nearly half an hour longer, lovingly applying the truth, whilst all present were listening with rapt attention. Never before was there such a largely-attended *after-meeting* in the same church.

He had spoken more loudly and strongly in the evening than in the forenoon, and no one sang more

heartily and energetically at family worship than he. The hymn sung was the 235th in the *Presbyterian Hymnal*, and he expressed special delight in the lines—

‘ I stand upon His merit,  
I know no other stand ; ’

and also in the stanza beginning—

‘ With mercy and with judgment  
My web of time He wove.’

Next morning, in a quiet talk, he asked one of the young people of the manse if she had any text as a motto, and, on receiving an answer, told her that the favourite verse of his daughter Jessie was: ‘ Jesus, who loved me, and gave Himself for me ; ’ and referring to the Latin saying, ‘ Nulla dies sine versu,’ he said that our motto should be, ‘ Never a day without a soul.’ He told her of a French chemist, who was said to take cupfuls of tears and turn them into sugar, but that God turned sorrow into joy.

In course of conversation with another of the family, he told her that when we were thorough Christians, we were saved much temptation. People would say, ‘ It is of no use trying him, he is thorough.’ He ended the conversation by saying, ‘ The Lord bless thee, and keep thee : the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee : the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.’

On leaving that day, he was accompanied to the gate by the whole family, and he said this was ‘ an apostolic

convoy.' He would be back again 'any day.' His presence is still real and living in the scene of his final ministerial labours, and the feeling of privilege and favour is still strong in that home that enjoyed the society and ministrations of so holy and loving and heavenly a servant of God over the last Sabbath of his life. On the way to the train he and Mr. Clark visited an aged sick person with whom he had been acquainted long before, when she was a nurse in the family of the late Rev. Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh. He left Barrhead between one and two o'clock.

About half-past two, he reached what he playfully called his Appii Forum—resting-place by the way—in Glasgow. On his arrival, there was, as usual, the few minutes' talk with the cabman—some of the way-side sowing—then he entered the house in his warm, bright way, and began to tell of his happy visit to Barrhead.

In his youth he had written, 'I wish, with Archbishop Usher, to die with the words of the publican on my lips ; with Mrs. Rowe, to die on my knees ; with Stephen, to die calling on God, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."'

Somewhat late he retired to his own room, to write some letters, which were to be posted in the morning. The closing words of one of them, to a brother in the ministry, were : 'How fast our days are running ! May the Lord surprise you in all your work with the richness of His blessing !'

Shortly before midnight his bell rang sharply, summoning his friends to his room, when he was found to be suffering from one of his heart spasms.

‘This is serious,’ was his remark on seeing them. He was able only to utter a few loving messages to the absent, and to his ‘dear congregation.’

After prayer had been offered on his behalf, he quoted the well-remembered words, ‘Jesus only,’ ‘who loved me, and gave Himself for me,’ adding, with his dying breath, and with much emphasis, ‘Precious blood.’ Restoratives were unavailing, and by the time the hastily-called medical attendant had arrived, consciousness had gone, and about midnight he was ‘beyond the flood, within the veil, before the throne.’

‘He was not, for God took him.’

‘The quiet chamber where the Christian sleeps,  
And where from day to day he prays and weeps,  
How near it is to all his faith can see,  
How short and easy may the passage be !  
One gentle sigh—one feeble struggle o'er,  
May land him safe on that eternal shore.’

A few days later, the mournful procession wended its way from the Newington Church, up the ‘Via Dolorosa,’ as he used to call the road leading towards that beautiful garden of the dead, the Grange Cemetery; and, as the precious dust was laid to rest, the melody of the children’s voices broke the silence and the sobs, as they sang—

‘There is a better world, they say,  
Oh, so bright !’



‘I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

‘And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power ;

‘That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.’

## Short Sayings.

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A FEW gatherings from earlier papers, previous to his ministry :—

We find him writing: ‘The British “Verse-a-day Association,” with which I have this morning connected myself (28th January 1832), is an evidence of some stirring excitement. The practice is quite analogous to that of gathering the manna in the morning.’

His characteristic style begins to appear very early in his occasional remarks. For example—speaking of chastisement—‘God forbid that when the rod is so vocal, I may refuse to hear its message to me.’

‘Oh, He can clear the darkest skies,  
Can give me day for night ;  
Make streams of sacred sorrow rise  
To rivers of delight.’

He writes: ‘I have come from witnessing a dying scene. It outpreaches the loudest preachers.’

‘We pray for a blessing on our daily rod, as well as on our daily bread.’

‘I have no indemnity from disappointment and

defeat; but I have a pledge that they shall be salutary.'

'It is the hungry Thou fillest. To *buy* in this market is to *beg*. "Buy without money and without price."

Speaking of what ought to be the terms of admission to the Lord's table, he says: 'Who would not open his arms to receive, at this marriage feast, those people he would rejoice to sit down with at the celestial supper of the Lamb!'

'... That uniform purity of motive which saves from that grand source of embarrassment—the fear of man.'

'To do good, and to receive evil, is the lot of every one who will follow in the footsteps of the Saviour.'

'Give us the heavenly use of earthly things. Let us not, like many profane Esaus, for a mess of pottage sell our inheritance.'

'There is a bank of Providence, which dishonours presumption, but which honours faith—a bank which is shut to indolence, imprudence, and carelessness, but which is open to diligence, wisdom, and prayer.'

'To barter away the joys and comforts of the favour of God, for the manifold misery of those who cannot stand in judgment—"no madness half so desperate as this."

'It is a divine art to preach to our own hearts what we find in the book of God, and to make it answer the purpose of exercising devout affections.'

‘ If ever there is a time when the integrity of a sincere minister is severely tried, it is when he goes to the house of mourning, to soothe a doating parent bereft of a child, at the age of maturity, who, while the state of mind and course of habits of neither have been those of one on the way to heaven, is administering to himself the opiate of a false consolation, that the beloved lost one is gone thither. He talks perhaps as if the sufferings of the body had procured the salvation of the soul. He is keeping himself easy, or looking wistfully for comfort. How shall the friend heal the wound without lulling the soul of the survivor into security ? Oh, it is a propitious moment for making an impression ! ’

‘ To have our own desire is of all others ‘ the most formidable fate.’ With such prosperity He may send leanness to our soul. When Jonah in his flight came down to the seashore, he found a ship just ready to sail. Was that a test of Jonah’s innocence, or of the Divine approbation ? ’

‘ As creatures we have no right, and as believers—as new creatures—we have no reason, to murmur.’

‘ Why do we recognise the good as fellow-Christians in the parlour, but treat them as heathen men and publicans at the table of the Lord ? ’

‘ His unsearchable sovereignty silences — His unsearchable love satisfies me.’

‘ Nature said, “ Curse God and die ; ” but grace whispered, “ Trust God and live.” ’

‘Let us prefer the unspeakable satisfaction of finding where truth lies, to the pitiful distinction of appearing drenched in the petrifying waters of a party, and vindicating our own waywardness.’

‘Let me think of my own frailties. For every one such in another I will find two in myself; nor will they be far to seek.’

‘It is religion alone that can blunt the arrows of pain, and brighten the gloom of calamity.’

‘Various sects maintain a sleepless jealousy of each other’s treatment of the word of God, and thus jointly afford a pledge for the purity of the great fountain of truth. If that Bible were read by angels in heaven, it would occasion no discordant sentiments and feelings there. It is to our depravity that all sectarianism is to be traced.’

‘Let us endeavour to ascertain the literal or first meaning of a text before we look on any other. This is the foundation on which every other sense must rest; and it will, when known, exceedingly assist us in obtaining a clear, full, and useful view of any deeper meaning, or any practical improvement which the passage may afford or impart.’

‘I am resolved to read scarcely one of the troublesome mosquito-swarm of polemic letters, and replies, and appeals, and vindications, and inquiries, that flit past me every day. The maxims of the fiery lovers of contention are in flagitious contrast to apostolic precept and example. . . .’

‘ The credit of Christianity, as well as the healing and purity of the Church, eminently call for none to stand forward on the field day, but those who have greatness enough of spirit to pass by the littleness of personal attack, who have coolness and meekness of wisdom enough never to misstate an opponent, never to adduce a doubtful fact, or overcharge a true one,—in short, to ‘strive lawfully.’ It may be hoped that the atmosphere of the Church will not be darkened with swarms of irascible spirits, that eat up everything green and pleasant.’

‘ It need not follow that the sober, solid defence of truth should become matter of indifference.’

‘ It is disheartening to think of the small, stinted, shrivelled souls that cry “Home, Home,” and would shut up Christianity in a little corner. God says, “Go, preach to every creature.” Satan says, and his emissaries on earth say, “What have we to do with every creature? Let us do what our hand findeth to do at home.” Who is on the Lord’s side? and who on Satan’s?’

‘ They have plenty to spend on noxious drugs and superfluous refinements, but, when we apply for something to put into the Christian treasury, they assure us they have nothing to spare. The world and the Church should be as distinct as the sun, moon, and stars from the clods of the valley.’

### Later Sayings.

‘ All is needful that He sends; nothing can be needful that He withholds.’

‘ Paul says of the “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan,” “there was *given* me.” Yes, even a messenger from Satan is a gift and a mercy, however unwelcome, when the Lord elicits from his visit “our sanctification.”’

‘ Simple remedy of sin and sorrow, to believe the love of God! We do not run as we ought in the way to heaven, because we do not love, and we do not love because we do not know how much we *are loved*.’

‘ The afflicted, like the poor, we have always with us, till death is swallowed up in victory.’

‘ God keeps a school for His children here on earth, and one of His best teachers is named Disappointment—a rough old pedagogue, stern in tone, and harsh in handling, but his lessons are well worth all that they cost.’

‘ It is a very easy thing to be a modern Christian, but a very difficult thing to be a Scriptural one.’

‘ Let me no longer resist or hinder Divine communications, or seek delight without God—seek joy and sweetness in the gall of bitterness—the living in the place of the dead.’

‘ Holiness in the soul from its being a grain of mus-

tard seed to the tallness and greenness of the cedar in Lebanon, must be Thy doing, O Spirit of the Lord.'

' May the Lord find His "*whole* armour" on us, and help us to keep it bright by constant use.'

' It looks like a contradiction, and yet how true,

' "Take *My yoke* and you shall find rest."

' "The *burden* I impose shall *ease* the heart."

' How sweet the gift! "*My* peace." It is heart's ease—a house on a rock—heaven begun!'

' Dread . . . turning aside after "the instruction that causeth to err;" or taking up with something that looks like conversion, but is not; or with that empty formal profession, which pacifies so many people's fears, and lets them keep their sins.'

' Though sin molest me as an enemy, never shall I, through grace, harbour it as a friend.'

' Carnality of mind is in the inverse ratio in which it is felt.'

' My religion is at a low ebb when I please myself with the discharge of external duties.'

' Can my sincerity in religion stand the test of seclusion?'

' May our fiery trials embitter sin and earth, and endear holiness and heaven!'

' What joys we have *by the way*! but the moment we rest *in* them, they become, like the quails to Israel, *poison*.'

' Oh that our eye may never be taken off the "rest that remaineth." Rest is not our portion here at

all. His *holiness* will not let us rest where there is sin. His *LOVE* will not let us rest where there is sorrow. There remaineth a rest for us—God's own rest. There will be neither sin nor sorrow there. There will be Himself there, and we shall *rest in Him*.

‘Friendship with the Lord Jesus is a calmly confiding thing. It is in no hurry to judge anything “before the time” when the mystery of His providence shall be completed and explained.’

‘A minister cannot do a kinder thing than occasionally go down amongst his hearers with his spiritual stethoscope.’

‘Spiritual decline is a disease which ought to be zealously watched.’

‘To ascend the pulpit is an honour more noble, a joy more pure, than even going up the steps of an earthly throne, to wear an earthly crown.’

‘“Christ died,” “Christ rose again.” These are the caskets in which are contained the gems of the sinner's salvation.’

‘If ye be not saved, it will be for any reason rather than that you had no Saviour.’

‘Is not this communion-table the mutual forget-me-not between Jesus and His friends?’

‘I fear the effect of sermons is often blighted by parental levity or criticism of ministers on the way home.’

‘I look on every church member as a talent

given me from God, and He is saying to me : “ Occupy till I come.” ’

‘ We do not receive because we ask not ; we do not ask because we do not feel ; we do not feel because we do not believe.’

‘ Don’t mock God by asking Him in prayer for what you do not want.’

‘ Clouds of blessing are over our head. Will not our united prayers bring the blessing down ? ’

‘ “ For ever with the Lord.” Isn’t that one of the hymns that make us feel home-sick ? ’

‘ I believe it is easier to go about during a lifetime and preach day and night, than to sit still and bear God’s rod with calm resignation.’

‘ Some people, when they get up in the world, forget their old friends. Though Jesus has “ gone up on high,” He forgets none, not even the least.’

Some sentences from sermons preached on a Fast-day in Collace in 1854 :—

Speaking on Psalm xlivi. 4—‘ I will go to the altar of God, *to God* my exceeding joy ’—he said : ‘ Too many go to the Lord’s table forgetting God beyond it —as if *coming to the finger-post were reaching the town.*’

On another text : ‘ *Real religion is an echo,* an echo of God’s testimony in the soul.’

‘ In the blood of Christ sins will sink, and the sinner will swim.’

‘The life of the unforgiven man is one great funeral procession.’

‘All Christians must work. What would happen in battle if only the officers fought?’

### hints Dropped at Sick Beds.

‘To recollect a promise of the Bible to the chief of sinners—*this* is substance.’

‘The Bible gives us something to *hold*. “It is I, be not afraid.” No comfort enters sick curtains from any other quarter.’

‘He thinks thoughts of peace, while I indulge thoughts of evil. He intends us better than we give Him credit for.’

‘I hope I know my refuge and fly to it. I find my foundation able to bear me.’

‘Is God your end, Christ your way, and the Spirit your guide?’

‘He that sends the storm is steering the vessel, is He not?’

‘We see how we should *live*, perhaps an hour before we *die*.’

## Extracts from Letters.

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EXTRACTS from letters to a young friend in his congregation, beginning with personal teaching, and guiding, during a series of years, in labours of Christian usefulness :—

‘ They were golden words that Legh Richmond uttered, when not far from the end of his pilgrimage : “ It is only by coming to Jesus as a little child, and as for the first time, that I can get peace at any moment.” It was not from his present holy feelings, or from anything about himself at all, that he maintained his cheerful piety, but hourly, momentarily, he came, as he had come at first, to Jesus, “ as a little child ; ” and by *thus* “ holding fast ” what gave him confidence at the first, he kept his confidence “ firm unto the end.” Does not the work of Jesus take for granted that you and I are *what we are*, and nothing else ? The multitude of our temptations, the blackness of our guilt, only make the open mercy-seat the more suitable for us both. Blessed be God, we can feel safe, and yet remember that we are vile ; we can approach the blood-sprinkled throne boldly, without

forgetting how vile we are. Let us ever take our stand side by side with the publican, the prodigal, the dying thief, owning that in ourselves we are vile as they, and as deeply indebted to the riches of redeeming grace.'

“ ‘Satan hath desired to have thee,’ my dear friend, ‘that he may sift thee as wheat.’ Wheat in the sieve, and the sieve in the hand of the great adversary! What can seem more helpless than that? But Jesus has been beforehand with him. ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.’ Satan watches to destroy you and me. Jesus watches to save us. Satan hates, Jesus loves. Satan is cunning, Jesus is all-wise. Satan is strong, Jesus is omnipotent. ‘Resist the enemy, and he will flee from you.’ ‘Resist,’ by presenting Jesus to him—Jesus, as having conquered for you. Present Jesus, in the greatness of the work He has accomplished, in the fulness of grace treasured up in Him, and the victory will be half-achieved before you begin to fight. Never can you be so strong as when casting your very weakness on Him—hanging on Him—trusting Him, ‘according to His word.’ Go to the God of love, in the name of Jesus, and with the sword of that word He will smite the tempter, and he cannot but ‘flee.’ ‘Whom resist, stedfast *in the faith*.’ Every other grace brings something. Faith brings nothing but an empty hand, and receives a full Christ.’

‘Indeed, I know no other Refuge than God in Christ. . . . And what other way can there be of entering that Refuge than simple trust? . . . Is not the Scripture so worded as precisely to teach us this? “They looked *unto Him*, and were lightened.” “Look *unto Me*, and be ye saved.” “Let not your heart be troubled.” Why? Where is the antidote? “Ye believe *in God*, believe also *in Me*.”’

‘Yes, in Jesus we have all, in ourselves nothing. It is not on our own experience we must try to live, but *on Jesus alone*. The well of salvation is not within us, but without; and from its exhaustless depths we must draw and drink for ever.’

‘The sole but *sure* support of the heart, under down-casting and deep heaviness, is realizing by faith “the Lord our Righteousness.”’

‘Being justified by faith in this truth, we *have* peace with God, and that peace makes the soul strong both for doing and suffering our Father’s will.

‘*Dwell much* on the idea of *grace*, reigning, royal grace,—grace to the chief of sinners,—grace coming through such a glorious channel, over all the mountains of sin. “He is *near* that justifieth me, *who* shall contend with me?” We plead “guilty before God,” inexusably guilty;—and yet, as standing in Jesus, we may plead “*not* guilty;” for His grace has redeemed us from the sin to which we pleaded guilty

before. "This is the victory that overcometh" depressions, misgivings, despondencies — "even our faith;" and our faith overcometh by identifying us with "Jesus Christ the Righteous."

'Hearts beating high with love to Christ and love to souls can only be the result of a close walk with God. Therefore, with all my heart do I accord with the longing you express for "a closer walk," for having our spiritual affections so cleansed and elevated, that we shall love, with a deep, earnest love, all holy things.—"To be spiritually minded is (indeed) life and peace"—to be so imbued, penetrated, and possessed by the Spirit of God, that sin shall be shunned and loathed, not merely from principle, but from taste; and then, towards thoughts and exercises that have in them anything of a Divine element, we turn with a readiness and vivacity which indicate the sweetest harmony between ourselves and them. This is "glorious liberty," the liberty of being bound to God; but it is a liberty which nothing can maintain or cherish, except growing familiarity with the Atoning Blood, and the sweet savour of the Great Sacrifice.'

'We need not disturb the seed in order to see it grow. The harvest *will* come, though no springing blade now appear to gladden the sower's eye. How often, unknown to us, must blessed spirits round the throne be called upon to strike their sweetest notes

over prodigals returned ! We hope to hear their anthems and to join in them ere long.'

' Giving up our own will to be conformed to His ! It is the best, the only liberty. And we "are ealled unto liberty," as well as "unto holiness." Yea, we shall abound in holiness just in proportion as we realize our blood-bought liberty,—"the liberty wherewith Christ hath (not will at length, but "hath" already) made us free."

' (Caledonian Canal.)

' No lack of leisure here, where, for two full days, we have been meeting with the not-unusual friendly salutation of these West Highlands—an "even-down pour." We are kept almost close prisoners in our cabin, and only from the windows can we catch glimpses of the high—the deep—the vast—of what is beautiful and what is awful ; but how wondrously fitted they all are to feed, by ceaseless novelty, the fire of devotion ! Might not half the number of blades of grass, and trees, and flowers have availed, if our God had restricted His goodness to what was just sufficient ? But this is not His measure. Both in nature and in grace, He giveth exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. It is not solitude to be in the presence of Him who " filleth all in all"—who "weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." '

' Oh that He, who has "*set His heart on man*," may

inspire us with a larger portion of His own boundless and tender charity! Can we set our hearts too yearningly on the bringing of some of His many sons to glory ?'

To another :—

‘I was disappointed at the failure of our joint scheme. . . . Since we have taken the Lord to be *our wisdom*, though He may see fit to lead us by roads both rough and roundabout, yet quite sure we are that His guidance of us all our journey through is wondrously wise, yea, more than any other could be, wondrously adapted to bring us in safety to our journey’s end. This is a life of waiting, and waiting on the Lord we “shall renew our strength, run and not be weary, walk and not faint.”

‘I have been preaching on Satan’s devices, and his “fiery darts,” and it is our rich comfort to know that even these our Father—our reconciled Father—turns into ploughshares and pruning hooks, for the culture of the soul, and for the increase of the fruits of holiness. However hard the fight be, however sore the stroke we get from the enemy, “all is safe” (as old John Welch of Ayr said) “so long as the heart is guarded by the breastplate of righteousness.” Yes, it is simple, hearty cleaving unto Jesus as our all for righteousness, and dealing trustfully with the blood of Christ, which maintains in the conscience the

blessed reign of peace, which is the grand secret of all spiritual power, and all prosperous achievement. Truly the liberty of God's children is "glorious liberty." The joy of the Lord *is* strength. Joy is a means of grace to us, and prepares us for receiving more abundantly gospel consolations.'

' . . . Christ is our life—the more we know and believe *this*, the greater vitality shall be imparted to all our movements. Our life is in heaven, beyond the reach of wounds, subject to no changes, weakened by no time, "hid with Christ in God." Satan cannot find it, far less destroy it. "God is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Let us stir each other up to live for glory, and "so much the more as we see the day approaching."

From letters to Mrs. D. :—

' What a heart-quieter that is, "Even so, Father" !

' . . . I trust you are experiencing more and more of that rejoicing confidence in God which extinguishes the fear of terror, and keeps alive the fear of sin. The truth about Christ's love in dying for us, so far from being a soporific, is the very stimulus to holiness, changing it from a thing of force to a thing of freedom, from being a service of drudgery to being a service of delight.'

' . . . If we think of God only as a righteous Law-

giver and Judge, invincible in power to punish us for our sins, the idea of His presence must be oppressively awful. If we have only vague views of His general mercy, His presence will in no way attract us. But when we see Him in Jesus as Just and yet the Justifier, not clearing the guilty by any means, yet forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, then His very justice and holiness become winning—we flee to Him with wondering confidence. With a reverence of His character which enhances our joy, we hide beneath the shadow of His wing. It is just in proportion as we keep full in view His gracious, holy character, as our reconciled Father in Christ, that the recollection of His presence will inspire us with delight, and make our path through life all radiant.'

‘I fondly trust, my dear friend, that you are so much in the habit of referring everything to God as a personal Friend in Christ, that the reference has become as it were instinctive—that no special effort of mind is now needed to recall the nearness of God, that you feel sweetly conscious of it as you do of the light and warmth of day. . . . Let us live at no uncertainty as to our state before God, and let us be satisfied with nothing less and nothing lower than the clear, deep seal of the Spirit that we are Christ’s. The more you have of this, you will get the faster on, on your way to heaven.

To a ministerial friend under bereavement :—

‘ I scarcely know whether most to congratulate you on having had such a mother, or condole with you on having lost her. . . .

‘ I am glad you had the satisfaction of being beside her, during these days which brought her pilgrimage to a close, and when, through the growing shades, eternity was beginning to cast upon her its mysterious gleams. How unabated is our ignorance ! How hopeless is our inquisitiveness, after we have accompanied to the dark frontier of that great world those who so lately lived with us, and like us ! How little we can descry of the manner of their existence, who now live to die no more ! But this ignorance of ours will not last long. How soon must our own accounts be audited in the presence of the great White Throne ! . . .

‘ It is well for us, dear ——, to feel keenly that there are points of far deeper importance than the mere *outward* work of the ministry. To turn in from the world upon oneself, and upon God,—to turn over the pages of our own heart, and to find relief from nature’s auguish by going direct to Jesus,—these are the exercises which string the soul for active service. May our eyes be ever kept open to the vain show of the things of earth, and the vastness of things eternal ! May Jesus draw us closer and closer yet to His own pierced side, that thence we may tell out the “glad tidings,” and that thither we may draw poor souls that are straying far from their rest !

‘ And of their joy and ours, departed friends in Jesus shall be the happy partakers.’

To a bereaved friend :—

‘ . . . It is a great thing to feel prayer our privilege. We *may* go. But is it not better still to feel it our necessity ? We *must* go. *Then* there is real depth, life, and meaning in our prayers. We are conscious of real wants, and we wait for real answers. “Lord, from the *depths* to Thee I cry.” ’

## Sermons to Children.

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### Jewels.

BEFORE reading the text, shall I tell you, my dear young friends, how very much I love you, and how glad it makes my heart to see your sunny faces.

Who is the happiest child in this house ? Who ?

I could answer that question, even though I had never seen the child, and though I don't know its name. The happiest child here is the child who reads the Bible most, believes the Bible most, and loves the Bible most.

My boy, is that you ? If so, I expect that you'll be standing in the pulpit some day, and preaching children's sermons. And one of the difficulties of doing it you'll find to be, the difficulty of fixing on a text. There's such a variety in the Bible. The Bible is a tree with so many widespread branches, and twigs, and leaves. You have been admiring beautiful Christmas trees. But come and see this wondrous tree of heaven.

The branches of this tree are the books of the Bible. How many in the Old Testament ? (39.) And in the New ? (27.)

Add these together, and you have a tree with how many branches? (66.) Then this tree has got twigs, and the twigs are the chapters, 1189 of them. There are leaves too on the Bible tree. Every verse is a leaf. There are 31,173 leaves waving here in all their beauty, for they are 'always green.'

And the tree is all laden, laden with fruit. See the rich clusters. How low they bend! Any little child may pluck them. And you may eat as much as you please.

Come and let us sit together a little while under the shadow of the tree of life, and may we find sweet to our taste the fruit which grows on the branch now by me—the third twig of the last branch of the Old Testament.

Malachi iii. What little scholar will be so kind as read for me at the 16th leaf? 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought on His name.'

Ver. 17? 'And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.'

We're not going to take the *whole* of that for our text. No. We'll only pick out, at present, a few words that lie in the middle of the 17th verse. 'The day when I make up my jewels.'

Or, it may help you, very little ones, to remember it all the better, if we just take these two words : ' My jewels.'

It is the last Sabbath of the year. The last Sabbath's sun has set. How many months is it since we met the old year first ? How many weeks is that ? We have had a long series of Sabbath services and Sabbath-school meetings since this time twelve months ; and these all, with their voices of love and mercy, of warning and instruction, will presently be gone—gone, with their account, to God, their account of the manner in which they have been used.

It was the thought of this last day that led me to think of that last day—the day when Jesus shall make up His jewels.

All the Sabbaths of this year Jesus has been stretching out His hands. Many a message has He sent by me, rising up early and sending. Yet are there not some unsaved ? The year about ended, and you not saved ! And is His patience worn out ? No. His hands are stretched out still. And, on this last Sabbath of the year, He stands and cries, ' How shall I give you up, sinners—how give you up ? ' As if the more careless some souls become, the more concerned He is for them. He stands and cries more loudly, more clearly, more freely than ever : ' I want you to believe My love.'

' My jewels.' Of *whom* is He speaking ? Is it of seraphs ? Is it of angels ? No. It is of sinful

children of the dust, once rude, unshapely stones, lying in the horrible pit and the miry clay, amid the rubbish of corruption ; but His love has sought and found them, and raises them to gem, throughout eternity, the Brow that once was wreathed with thorns.

Converted children are the jewels of Jesus ; and there's a day coming when Jesus will make up His jewels.

What was it ? Converted children are the jewels of Jesus.

And I name to you as many reasons as there are fingers on that hand why they are called His jewels.

Because they are precious. Because they shine. Because they are safely kept. Because He polishes them ; and because He prepares to set them in His crown.

*1st Reason. Because they are precious.* Some of this world's jewels are worth a great deal. Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, had one so large and beautiful, that it cost £80,000. I have read of another, possessed by an emperor of Persia. It was of the size of a pigeon's egg, finely shaped, reflecting the richest lustre, and valued at £110,000. A ship was once sent over to South America in order to secure one single jewel.

Some of your parents, who were up at the great London Exhibition, saw, in the Crystal Palace, a jewel that was known by a peculiar name. Do any of you remember the name ? The Koh-i-noor. Yes, and

its English name is ‘The Mountain of Light.’ Many a battle has been fought for that jewel. Hundreds of lives have been lost in the struggles to secure it.

But, dear children, can you tell me of any jewels far lovelier, and more precious than these? Suppose this church were filled to the very ceiling with jewels like these, yon little girl, in the corner, carries something about with her that outweighs them all.

Oh that soul of yours, that soul! That thinking soul, which will never cease to think. Death will come, but *it* shall not die. Your soul shall live as long as God. What will you give in exchange for your soul? I am sure that God prizes it ‘above the topaz of Ethiopia.’ For He gave His own dear Son to save it.

Remember, your precious soul is in danger of being lost, as long as it remains in the City of Destruction, in which we all were born. Many souls are lost in the High Street of Unbelief, as well as in Drunkenness Wynd, and in Sabbath-breaker’s Row, and in that low, dark, dirty lane called Liar’s Lane.

Many, many a soul perishes, like Lot’s wife, half-way to salvation.

Oh, precious soul, arise, flee! Look not behind you, except it be to speed your flight, by a moment’s glance at the danger, whose hot breath is on your back.

See! the finger-posts are pointing, ‘Refuge, Refuge.’

But it is not enough to know that there is a refuge ready for you. You are only safe when you have

really got over the threshold, and when you are really within the sheltering walls. God is thy Refuge, sinner. All heaven wishes you would escape for your life.

A Hebrew minister or Rabbi had gone away on a journey, far from home. It was long ago, when there were no railways, and no telegraphs. During his absence, his only children—two sweet girls—were seized with that fierce fever, which makes such sad havoc among those of your age sometimes. Scarlet fever ran its course very rapidly, and they both died. There was no possibility of sending word to their father. But, two days after, he returned, somewhat late in the evening. His wife had the house all set in order for him. And after he had rested a little, she began to tell him of several things that had happened when he was away. ‘One thing,’ said she, ‘was this. A friend of ours, who had lent me some jewels, came to ask me to return them. Oh, I wished you had been here to advise me, for I was very unwilling to give them up.’

‘My dear,’ he replied, ‘how should you have been at any loss? Didn’t you say it was a loan?’ Without answering a word, she took him by the hand, and led him upstairs, into the room with the white-covered bed, and, in a burst of maternal anguish, exclaimed, ‘These were our jewels, love. “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.”’

My beloved little ones, ye are your mothers’ jewels.

Oh how much she loves you! She cannot tell how much.

Yet even her watchful, loving eye grows dim and closes. Some of you have known what it is for her to take in her cold, dying hand yours, and, with a heart yet warm, to say, 'I am going to glory, follow me there.'

But the warmest heart among us is cold as ice and hard as adamant, compared with His who died for you, and who says to all who trust in Him, 'My jewels.' 'Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me.'

No wonder that He should be our Treasure! But that He should call us 'His treasure,' wonder, O ye heavens, at this!

'The Lord's portion is His people.'

*2nd.* Converted children are the jewels of Jesus *because they shine.* If I had found, on the way down from Edinburgh this evening, a child all covered with mud, and had brought him up into this pulpit with me, you would have looked, and cried, 'What a sight!' But if the child had been carried down into the vestry there, and well washed, and clothed in a fine silk dress, and then brought again into the midst of us, and I were to ask, 'Did you ever see that child before?' you would be ready to answer, 'Surely no, but it is a lovely one.'

Dear young friends, so long as you are unconverted, you are like the child when you saw it first, in its loathsomeness. But when you know and believe

Christ's love to you, and so become His jewels, you are like the child in its cleanliness and beauty. He adorns you with a shining dress, puts ornaments of grace upon your head, and chains about your neck.

A few years ago, there was a great nobleman sent on an embassy to this country, from Nepaul in Hindoostan. When he was driving in his splendid carriage through London, he saw a poor black man, who was sweeping the crossings in the street, and who had done so for many years. He stopped his carriage, beckoned to the poor Hindoo, spoke a few words to him at the carriage steps, and the next moment the poor man's besom was flung in over the railing, while he sprang up into the carriage, and sat beside his wealthy countryman. Next time he was seen out, he was dressed in the richest raiment, glittering with jewels, sitting by the nobleman, and acting as his interpreter.

This is something very like Christ's way of giving you the joy of pardon, and the wealth of a better world, and taking you to interpret His heart of love to the strange people of this evil world.

Can you tell me whether it was an evil time that my text speaks of ? Yes, an evil time it was, a dark time, when sin was very rife, religion very low. But in the midst of all that gloom, the light of God's children was shining. '*Then, they that feared the Lord . . . thought upon His name.*'

You notice how converted ones were known. By

their thoughts—‘They thought upon God’s name.’ By their feelings—‘They feared the Lord.’ And by their conversation—‘They spake often one to another.’ Their thoughts were shining ones. Their feelings were shining ones. Their mouths were shining ones.

I repeat. Their thoughts shone. They thought upon God’s name.

Can there be any religion without thinking? Do you expect to be saved without thinking? To be sure, many deep thinkers are not converted men. Why? Because they don’t think upon the right thing, ‘God’s name.’

There are many separate syllables in God’s name.

His goodness, for instance. You see it written on the book of Nature’s beauties.

His greatness . . . written on the illuminated manuscript of starry skies.

His faithfulness . . . in stone books which are now being dug out of the ruins of Babylon and Nineveh.

His hatred of sin . . . in the red books of ghastly war, and the black books of pestilence and death.

But where is it that all the different syllables of God’s name are gathered into one? It is in the gospel, the blessed gospel, and this is the pith and marrow of it, ‘God is love.’ ‘A just God, and a Saviour.’ ‘God is love, can that be true?’

I recollect of a kind black servant, who was travelling with his master's family, through a country infested with wolves. Suddenly he saw two of these terrible animals rushing out of the wood towards them. 'Massa, Massa,' he cried, 'they will devour the dear children. Let me jump out, and the time they're eating me, you and the dear children will get away.' And he did jump out before the hungry wolves, who instantly seized him, and tore him in pieces. Is not this a little picture of Jesus giving His life for our life?

'Out of pity Jesus said,  
I'll bear the punishment instead.'

I bless God for that word 'instead.' It was through that word I got one of my first glimpses of the way to be saved, of how the death of Jesus so fully satisfied for sin. It is finished. All atoning work done. The vail of the temple rent in twain, from the top to the bottom—not from the bottom to the top, but from the top to the bottom,—because it was done from heaven, by God's own hand, not leaving an inch for mine to rend.

'Before, it was death to go in. Now, it is death to stay out.'

You are all wanted to go in at once, and go up to the mercy-seat, and be forgiven. It is thus you become converted, and numbered with Christ's jewels.

Set down on your slate (boy) a thousand ciphers. They signify nothing. But begin the line with a figure, and they all count something now. So it is only if you begin at the beginning aright, by taking the peace that is ready made, taking it from the naked merit of the true atonement—it is only when you have taken this coming step, that anything that follows it can be well-pleasing to God. For then only have you begun aright to think upon God's name.

Converted ones are also said here to be known by their feelings. They 'fear the Lord.' Their feelings shine, for all their feelings are happy, and all their dispositions new. It is because they love God as a Father, that they now fear to offend Him. He keeps no slaves in His family, no creeping things in His temple—just happy children, singing praise.

Besides, converted children (Christ's jewels) are here said to be known by their conversation. Their mouths are shining ones. For they speak often one to another. They speak of their common Father, their common hope, and their common home.

I saw on the High Street, the other day, some boys whose mouths were pouring out oaths and other abominable words. And I thought of what David compared such mouths to—'an open sepulchre.' Such boys have mouths as black as the grave. . . .

. . . I hope the elder people here are not trying any other than God's way of being saved. Do you

like God's way ? It is just by liking it, submitting to it, feeling that it is far sweeter for you to have none of the praise, but to let Jesus have the whole —it is thus alone you are put among the jewels of Jesus.

And the only way to become bright with the beauties of holiness is, to let in more of the love of Jesus. The more directly your face is turned to Him, the more sweetly will you shine.

*3rd Reason* we assigned for converted children being called Christ's jewels is, that *they are safely kept*. When a cloud of dust is raised on the street, and your eye is in danger, how you put your hand at once over it. Well, Jesus keeps His jewels 'as the apple of His eye.' 'He that keepeth them will not slumber.'

Can you tell me where the Jewish high priest of old kept the names of all the tribes of Israel ? It was on his breastplate. And in that breastplate there were four rows of jewels or precious stones—three in each row. There were the ruby and the topaz, the jasper and the emerald, the sapphire and the diamond, the ligure and the agate, the beryl and the onyx, the carbuncle and the amethyst. These were all figurative of converted souls. And who is our great High Priest—the true Aaron ? Has He a breastplate with only twelve stones on it ? No, all believers, of every age, and from every land, are jewels on the breastplate of Jesus. And shall all hell be able to

pluck one of them—any of them—out of His hand or from His heart ?

Did you ever notice a poor frightened bird, closely followed by a hawk hovering over her in the air, and on the very point of striking down upon his prey ?

One Saturday afternoon, when Ralph Erskine was walking in the field, thinking over his sermon, such a dove, so pursued, flew into his arms. Did he tear the little trembler roughly from her shelter, and throw it again within reach of the talons of the destroyer ? No. Even the mischief-loving school-boy will not hurt the robin, when, driven by the bare hedges to seek for food, it hops in at the open door, while the wintry wind is sweeping. Even that little boy cannot cast out the little bird that trusts him.

And will He do less—the large-hearted, loving-hearted Saviour ? Will He ‘ deliver His turtle-dove to the multitude of her enemies ? ’

Oh that you may all be doves in His bosom, and jewels on His breastplate. So shall you be kept for ever safe.

*4th Reason* for calling them the jewels of Jesus is, that *He puts them through a process of polishing*. Do you see that man passing along the street with a stone in his hand ? Where is he going ? He says he is going to the lapidary’s shop. Come with me, and I’ll show you what he does with the stone. The lapidary puts it into his machine, and smooths its surface by his art, and by and by you see beautiful colours coming

out. Just so are we to put our stony hearts into the hands of Jesus, that He may smooth their roughnesses, and 'mould them to His will.'

Dear Sabbath-school child, if you are a jewel of Jesus, you need not weep so bitterly over your poverty, over your trials. When the prodigal had his pockets full, he set off; but famine drove him home.

When you lost your little sister in the hooping-cough, when you saw her poor body lying cold and stiff in the coffin, when you heard the clods fall heavily, hollowly on the coffin-lid at the grave, and eame away from it so sad and dreary, was not Jesus speaking to you, and polishing you ?

When I stepped into the railway carriage, one bright summer day, my attention was taken up with the friends who stood there to bid me good-bye. As the train moved on, the mile-posts seemed racing past. And then, suddenly, hissing like some vast serpent, it plunged into the tunnel. Then, for the first time, I observed the lamp overhead burning. It had been there all the while, yet because the bright sun made it useless, I noticed it not. But I said to myself, How truly are God's most precious promises like that lamp in the railway !

We have them always with us, yet we fail to prize them fully, while the sun of prosperity is shining. But let our path lie through the dark tunnel of dying seenes, how the blessed gospel beams forth then, like the railway lamp, to cheer us, and to shed

its happy light most brightly amid the thickest gloom.

So, many a humble child of God, suffering in her hovel or her garret, may, by her one talent of sweet submission, be gaining ten to the Saviour's treasury. All who remember the *Dairyman's Daughter* will understand what I mean. She was a jewel of the first water, and most sweetly did Jesus smile upon her steps, as she passed through the 'shadow of death.' Little did she know how far her light would shine.

Several years ago, a Christian friend was sauntering among the graves in a churchyard, in the Isle of Wight, when he saw a lady, in deep mourning, and a little girl, sitting on a tombstone. The lady was reading a little book to the girl, who was looking up into her mother's face, through her tears. That lady was the Duchess of Kent, and that girl the then Princess Victoria, now our beloved Queen. They were sitting on the grave of the *Dairyman's Daughter*, reading together her touching story.

Another day, near the same spot, Legh Richmond, the honoured author of the book, had occasion to lend a telescope to a stranger visitor. That led to some acquaintance, and to his sending him a copy of the *Dairyman's Daughter*. The stranger turned out to be the Emperor of a distant nation, through whom the book was translated, and was the means of gathering, both in his own family and elsewhere, much fruit to God. Verily the Church is the jewel in the ring of

the world's history, and all her afflictions are from the hand of the Polisher.

The Koh-i-noor diamond, when it came into the Queen's possession, was a misshapen lump. It was very desirable to get its corners cut off, and all its sides reduced to squares, but no unskilful hand was permitted to touch it. Men of science were called to consider the form of its crystals, the direction of its grain, and the side on which it would be most pressable. By their instructions, the jewel was placed in the hands of an experienced lapidary, and by long, patient, careful labour its sides were ground down to the desired proportions.

The gem was hard, and needed a heavy pressure. The gem was precious, and every precaution was taken, which science and skill could suggest, to get it polished into shape, without cracking in the process.

Well, the effort was successful. The hard diamond was rubbed down into forms of beauty, and yet sustained no damage by the process of the lapidary to which it was subjected.

Jewels, bright jewels, in the form of little children, are the heritage which God gives to every parent.

They are unshapely, and need to be polished.

They are hard, and cannot be reduced to symmetry without firm handling.

They are brittle, and so liable to be permanently damaged by the pressure.

But they are stones of peculiar preciousness, and if they were successfully polished, they would shine as the stars for ever and ever, giving off brilliantly the glory they get from the Sun of Righteousness.

Do you possess these diamonds in the rough ? Oh, strike them not unskilfully ; nor let them lie uncut.

Should not your richest treasure be your chief care ?

*5th and finally.* Converted children are the jewels of Jesus, *because they are imperishable ones, and are going to be set for ever in an imperishable crown.*

A lady was dressing one evening for a fine party. She had all her jewels on. But, sad to tell, her sleeves caught fire at the gas. She ran about the room screaming for help. The flames spread to the curtains. The whole house was soon in flames, and it was burned to the ground. When the labourers came to clear away the rubbish, what do you think they found of the lady ? Nothing but a handful of black dust. Yet, there lay her jewels unhurt, though the gold and silver which had been round them had melted.

Well, the fire that will melt this earth, and turn that sea to vapour, will not consume any of the jewels of Jesus. They will stand even the searching fire of that dreadful day. ‘They shall triumph, when the world is in a blaze.’

‘They shall be Mine,’ says He. I will own them as Mine. I will show them to be Mine. I will come to be glorified in My saints.

These are they ‘whom the King delighteth to honour.’

They shall behold His glory, and share His glory, and add to His glory.

Sir Isaac Newton, with his telescope, looked among the stars; but how surprised he would have been, had he some night descried through to the pearly gate of heaven! Why, in the pulpit with me here, I’ve got a telescope, of God’s own making, through which you can see heaven’s golden streets, and heaven’s throne of glory, and the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and the rainbow round about the throne. Yes, we see, through this glass, some of the very jewels already sparkling in the crown of Jesus. What a lovely jewel is Joseph there!

And that great favourite of our childhood. He who, when a boy, had a little coat, with long sleeves, made by his mother, for his New Year’s day gift—the boy who was not afraid to be left alone in the dark at night, who went away at once when bidden, and lay down by himself to converse with God. Who was he? Yes, Samuel.

And yonder is the dear child who had a bad father, and all bad around him, yet ‘in him there was found some good thing.’ Religion had its home in his heart, and it loved its home. What was his name? Abijah.

And who is yon, shining as the brightness of the firmament—a man who, while here, outshone all

others in the grace of meekness ? His name is ? Moses.

It reminds me of a dear meek lamb of Jesus, who died about eight years old. His body was stretched out in a darkened back room, waiting to be laid away next Monday in the dust. His heart-broken mother and his little sister had stepped in, to take another look of the face that was dead. As they stood gazing, the little girl asked to take his hand. At first the mother did not think it best, but when the child repeated the wish earnestly, she lifted the chill, bloodless hand, and placed it in his sobbing sister's. The affectionate girl pressed it fondly, and then looking up at her mother, through gushing tears, she said, 'Mother, that dear hand never struck me.' My boys, are you always so meek and gentle, that, if you were to die this week, your sister could take your hand, and say, 'This dear hand never struck me' ?

' He sees how children dwell in love,  
And marks them for His own.'

Tommy stopped his mother when she was teaching him that, and said, ' Is God willing to mark a little boy like me ? I suppose the biggest mark will be loving Jesus for His so loving us.' And then he added, ' Happy, happy Tommy, if God will mark me for His own.'

Beloved children, Is not a place in Christ's crown worth seeking ? ' They that seek Me early shall find

Me.' That's *your* promise. The older folks here have other promises, but they have not that promise—that's all your own. Cling to it then. Seek Jesus. Oh, seek Him, and you shall find Him early.

Did you never detect in yourselves (my older friends) a lingering feeling of distrust, when reading the accounts of the conversion of very young persons—say of children under ten or twelve years of age? That was often the case with me. Recent circumstances, however, under my own observation have produced a great change in my views of this subject. I believe that children may become intelligent Christians, Christ's jewels, at a much earlier age than is generally supposed. The longer I preach I feel more that conversion is the main thing, and that youth is the converting time. I believe that far more direct and specific efforts for their early conversion ought to be used by ministers, parents, and Sabbath-school teachers. Oh, *aim at it*, and *expect it*. The key to their hearts is the knowledge of the heart of God.

Pray much—very much—that that key may be applied, and their hearts opened. Pray for child by child in your class, each child by name, and let this be your cry, 'Holy Spirit, put them among the jewels of Jesus. Wilt Thou not do it this week? Wilt thou not do it now?'

If you came up to Edinburgh to-morrow evening, and heard the bells ringing out a merry peal from

every steeple, and the cannon from the Castle roaring out their harsh joy, and the streets all blazing with illumination, wouldn't you say, 'It can't be a trifle over which they are all rejoicing. Some great thing must have occurred.'

Well, come up with me in, through, to the heavenly city. Lo, they are all keeping jubilee. Must it not be some great thing that has filled all heaven with fresh joy? The conversion of a single soul does it. Any soul—the soul of a pauper in the poorhouse, or the soul of that pauper's child.

How the angels, that are hovering over us, would fly back to heaven more angelic than they came, could they carry the tidings that you, Thomas, William, Robert, Eliza, Jane, Mary, had this evening been put among Christ's jewels, and are going to be set as jewels in His crown eternally!

Oh that God may send to all your schools such revival as angels like to see—the breaking of hard hearts, and the healing of broken ones; the weeping of convinced sinners, and the joy of converted sinners; the fleeing of souls from hell, and the flocking of souls to heaven!

Oh that a more powerful voice than ours may reach them, and a more powerful arm than ours bring them to Jesus!

Even that voice of the Lord which is full of majesty, that arm of the Lord which is omnipotent to save.

Blessed Spirit, do Thine own work. Decide Thou these children's choice. Draw each heart to cry—

'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,  
Look upon a little child ;  
Pity my simplicity ;  
Suffer me to come to Thee.'

Fain I would to Thee be brought ;  
Gracious Lord, forbid it not.  
'Mong the jewels of Thy grace,  
Give a little child a place.'

## Crowns.

WILL you read with me, or read for me, two little Bible verses ? Would some boy read the one, and some girl the other ? They are both written by the *same John*, about the *same Jesus*. The first you will find in the Gospel of John, xix. 2. What boy has found it ? Read the whole verse.

‘And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.’

The second of the two passages you will find in John’s Book of Revelation, xix. 12. Will some girl be so kind as read the middle clause ?

‘And on His head were many crowns.’

Now, put them together—His ‘crown of thorns’ and ‘His many crowns’—

His ‘crown of thorns’—on earth.

His ‘many crowns’—in heaven.

On *this* hand, would you carry away the thought of the first, and on *that* hand the thought of the second ?

I. The ‘crown of thorns’—worn on earth.

1. What *cruelty* it was, this putting on His head a crown of thorns ! For the thorny spikes went deep and sharp. If they had meant merely to mock Him,

they would have made Him a crown of straw; but as they wished to give Him as much pain as possible, therefore they fashioned a 'crown of thorns.' Matthew (xxvii. 30) and Mark (xv. 19) tell us that one 'smote Him on the head with a reed.'—Yes, *on the head*—and I have no doubt they did it on purpose—driving deep the sharp points of the thorns into His temples and on His brow. Immediately we see the heavenly, suffering face of Jesus bathed in blood. Yet did He utter a single angry word? No. He was silent as a lamb! For He knew our sin deserved it all.

2. What *contempt* and what insult there was in their thus putting on His head this 'crown of thorns'? He had said He was a king. So, to make sport of Him, they dressed Him in a purple robe—like that which kings used to wear, and put into His hand a reed for a sceptre—such as kings used to hold, and then, as your hymn says—

'With mocking scorn  
And crown of thorn,  
They bore Him to Calvary!'

3. In spite of all the *cruelty* and of all the *contempt*, what *comfort* it is to you and to me, the sight of the thorny crown! For I see in it a striking picture of the way in which sinners are saved.

How came thorns to be in the world at all?

You hear the answer in what God said to Adam, after he had sinned (Gen. iii. 17), 'Cursed is the

ground for thy sake ;' ver. 18, ' thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.' Ever since, thorns have been growing on the earth, as the token of sin's curse. So when the soldiers wreathed these thorns, they were just crowning Jesus with the symbol of the curse. Though they did not mean it, they were really setting forth in figure the grand truth (Gal. iii. 13), ' Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.'

In John (xix. 5) we read that ' Jesus *came forth*, wearing the crown of thorns.' ' He came forth,' as one not ashamed of His sufferings for our sakes. No—but glorying in them. So He brought up with Him from the grave, the print of the nails—the marks of the same cruel death ; ay, and He carried them with Him to heaven ; for He appears as the ' Lamb slain,' yonder, ' in the midst of the throne.'

It is a remarkable circumstance in the last days of the late Chancellor of England—Lord Lyndhurst—that, after he was 90 years of age, he learned to know and love Jesus, and this was what he said : ' I used all my days to wonder what good people meant when they talked of " the blood." But I understand it all now. It is just substitution—Christ's life for our life—Christ's death instead of our death.' And when he was asked, very near his end, ' Are you happy ?' his answer was, ' Supremely happy—resting upon *that*.' It was a soft pillow for his dying head—

thinking of the head that for him was ‘crowned with thorns.’

I have heard of a minister, whose congregation had been long left cold and dead, because there had been so little about *that* in his preaching! One Sabbath morning when he came into his pulpit, he found, on the cushion, a slip of paper with these words written on it, ‘Sir, we would see Jesus.’ His heart smote him, he was led to much thought and prayer, and from that time the name of Jesus was poured forth as ointment among that people, and many of them began to say, ‘Lord Jesus, I take Thee to be my Substitute! Thou art mine! It is just as if *we* had been crucified, as if *we* had died already!’

‘Precious name! oh how sweet!  
Hope of earth, and joy of heaven!’

How often do you think that ‘Name’ occurs in the New Testament? Find out for yourselves. John, who lay on His breast, uses it about twice as often as Matthew! Ah! it is those who know Jesus best and love Him most who are the last to weary of hearing about Christ and His crown of thorns!

I saw in a hedge, all bristling with thorns, the pretty nest of a little bird. Why did the bird build its nest there? Why? Because the thorns were a protection to it from harm. Well, I thought I would bid you nestle among the thorns of Jesus, for there is no resting-place so safe for timid, trembling souls.

When you have said, 'Lord Jesus, I accept Thee as my Substitute—as having paid it all for me'—then come, and crown His blessed head with other crowns.

Hark ! from among these thorns, I hear a solemn warning ! What is it ? A warning against our ever committing the same sin that these soldiers did, when they wove the crown of thorns. 'The same,' say you, 'why, never would I weave such a crown for that dear head !' Ah ! my dear young friends, all who do not put their hand into Jesus' hand, and say 'Yes' to Him just now, are really gathering thorns, and twisting them around His brow !

There was a little bit of poetry we used to repeat in our school-days, 'The death of Gellert.' Do you know it ? When his master was out of the house, a wolf attacked the cradle where his master's child was sleeping. The faithful dog destroyed the wolf, saved the child, and lay down beside the cradle. When the Welsh chieftain entered, and saw the blood lying round the cradle, in hot haste he killed the dog ! and when he came to know the wrong that he had done—slain the dog that had saved his child !—he went out and wept right bitterly. And this was only for a dog ! But it is the Christ of God whom we have murdered by our sin. They say that every time Peter heard the cock crow, he wept bitterly, as one well accustomed to weep ; and when the ribald world still clamours, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him,' will

not *your* voices be louder still, ‘Crown Him, crown Him, Lord of all.’

II. His ‘many crowns’ in heaven. ‘On His head were many crowns’ (Rev. xix. 12). Crowns of two sorts. Crowns of power and crowns of praise.

1. Crowns of Power, for Jesus is a King, and as such He wears—

(1) The *Crown of creation*. ‘All things were made by Him, and for Him.’ There’s not a pebble on the seashore, there’s not a dew-drop trembling on a rose leaf, but is the workmanship of Jesus! Who is this, who comes walking on the waters? Who is He who is standing up in yon boat, and saying to the storm, ‘Peace, be still!—and it crouched at His feet? Lo! it is Jesus! ‘Jesus only,’ who over all nature sways His sceptre, and wears His crown!

(2) The *Crown of providence* is on His head. Yes—for ‘He upholds all things by the word of His power.’

I remember when I was first taken to see a large piece of machinery, like one of your mills at the ‘East End’—wheels after wheels—wheels within wheels; they all seemed tangled and twisted; all working at cross purposes. Often have I thought of it since, how closely it resembles the pictures of God’s providence in Ezekiel (chaps. i. and x.), where we are told that over the wheels was there ‘the likeness of a man,’ who is just our own Jesus, on whose head is the crown of providence.

During the persecution which raged in France, in the year of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, when so many Protestants were killed, a good minister hid himself in a hay-loft, and would most certainly have been starved to death, if there had not come, every morning, a hen into the place where he was, and laid the egg which preserved his life.

What is the price of a sparrow? How many would you get for a farthing? Two. Ask the woman for two farthings' worth, and how many would she give you? Five. Yes, they are such tiny little things, she throws one into the bargain! Yet not one of them is forgotten by Jesus! or falls to the ground without our Father!

Have you ever been in London? If you have, perhaps you have seen already, or if not, remember to look, the first time you go, *at the top of the spire of the London Exchange*, and you will see a curious weather-cock, in the shape of a monster grasshopper! How did it come to be there? About 350 years ago, a woman with a little baby in her arms was trudging along a little English country lane. I am sorry to say it, but the mother had forgot to love her child, and wanted to get quit of the trouble of bringing it up. So, after looking this way and that way, to see that nobody was watching her, she climbed over a gate into a field, and, wrapping the baby-boy in her tattered shawl, she laid it down among the grass, and left it there.

By and bye, down the lane came a schoolboy, whistling aloud on his way home. Just as he reached the gate, over which the woman had climbed, he heard the chirp, chirp, chirp of a grasshopper, and over the gate he jumped to catch it. And he had not gone far till, among the grass, he found the baby fast asleep. Up he took the little fellow, and carried it in his arms to a farmhouse, where the farmer's kind wife took care of the little orphan, till he grew up to be a young man. Then he went into a situation in London, and by his good conduct rose to be one of the richest merchants in the City. Queen Elizabeth often sent for him to dine with her, and then she made him a knight — with the title 'Sir Thomas Gresham.' So he built the Royal Exchange, and placed this monster grasshopper on the topmost pinnacle, and it is still there to tell you and me that, as in the case of Ishmael, 'God heard the voice of the lad.'

Jesus, the Lord of Providence, can save a valuable life by means of a very little thing. He hangs heavy weights on very small wires; and if you and I know Him as our own Saviour, we may well leave our burden at His feet, and take a song away.

Good Martin Luther used to say, when the Reformation was being wrought by storms, that a little bird sang good cheer to him as it hopped to and fro in its cage. Nobody could say what it was singing, but

Luther declared that the little bird always sang to him this little ditty—

‘Luther, Luther, cease your sorrow,  
God provideth for the morrow.’

Dear children, the moment you come to Jesus, there is real rest for you, and in the cage of your heart there sings a merry little bird whose note is—

‘Cease your sorrow, cease your sorrow,  
God provideth for the morrow.’

But those two crowns of creation and providence are both for the sake of

(3) The *Crown of grace*. As the hymn runs—

‘Of all the crowns that Jesus wears,  
Salvation is His dearest claim.’

Suppose you have a watch, and it won’t go. You take it to the watchmaker, and he says, ‘I do not wonder that it does not go, for the mainspring is broken.’ Well, unless you get into your heart that mainspring, the love of Christ, your life will never go right.

It is the happiest thing on earth to believe His love to you—to know that, as King of grace, He has put your sins quite away.

It is an *out and out* forgiveness, and it comes *all at once*, quicker than the telegraph! quicker than thought! The King of grace does things so grandly! No one except the king or the queen sitting on the throne, can grant a pardon to a man condemned to die.

Did you ever see a copy of such a pardon ?

It says that it pardons and puts away all the bad things the man has done 'sic like,' as if that bad thing had never been done at all.

That is like the way Jesus forgives. Your punishment has passed to Him, and His righteousness passes to you. His love closes round you, and you are His perfectly pardoned, happy child. You may go as near to Him and feel as one with Him as you like. You cannot go near enough—you cannot feel one enough !

'Oh, to grace, how great a debtor !'

When Buonaparte was in his prison in St. Helena, he uttered this memorable sentence, 'I founded my empire on the sword, and it is gone. Jesus Christ established His kingdom in *love*, and it will last for ever !'

Little Mary's mother was showing her a picture of Jesus, with children in His arms and crowding round Him, and some of the mothers were rebuked for pushing forward their boys and girls to go to Jesus. 'That's what *I* would have done, Mary, if I had been there,' said her mother. 'I would have pushed you to Him.'

What do you think Mary's answer was ? 'Mother, I should not want to be pushed. I would have gone to Jesus without pushing.'

My dear children, will *you* go to Jesus without

pushing? Will you go now? You may. What magnet will draw you, if not that?

One afternoon, the Queen went into the cottage of a poor old woman in the Highlands, and the old woman had not the least idea who she was, but somehow or other she found it out, just as the Queen was leaving. After she was gone, she took the chair on which the Queen had been sitting, and put it away in a place by itself, saying, 'Did she sit so graciously beside me on that chair? Nobody else shall ever sit on it.' I think it would be something like that with you, if you only let Jesus into your heart. You would say, 'My heart belongs to Him alone. No one else shall ever have that place. Take my heart just as it is. Set up there Thy throne, so shall I love Thee above all, and live only for Thee!'

All Christ's *crowns of grace* are *crowns of victory*.

*Victory over Satan*—as in yon terrible grapple with him in the wilderness, when Jesus cut away the Tempter's flimsy lies with one sweep of His sword, 'It is written, it is written.' And I read in Revelation xix. 16, that Jesus 'has on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.' When Jesus died, Satan shouted, 'I think I have Him now!' Ah! he cries 'Victory' too soon! Jesus, in dying, set His foot upon the head of the Old Serpent, and when He bowed His head and gave up the ghost, it was

just that His head might wear crowns of victory over the Destroyer.

*Victory over death* too. Jesus died that He might take the deadly sting out of death to all who love Him. One of my school companions, who was stricken down when young, had no fear of death, for Jesus had taken the sting away. The last thing he said to his mother was—and as if he had been one of Bunyan's Pilgrims passing through the dark river, and looking back to those he had left on the shore—‘I find Jordan to be but an ordinary stream.’

When I was at school, I saw a canary in a cage, and it was very happy picking its food, and sipping out of its little cup, and singing its songs. But one day the cage was lying all broken on the floor, and the bird was not there! Where was it? It had fled away (so they told me) to a warmer climate, where it was still singing—singing under sunnier skies. So is it with those who trusted in Jesus, and have been taken away by death. It is only the cage which was broken and buried, but the spirit which used to speak to you, and love you, and be happy with you, was never touched.

Never! Death is the gate of life—not life imprisoned, but life set free—life exulting in the fulness of Christ’s joy!

The second class of His ‘many crowns’ which we have named is—

2. Crowns of Praise. The praises of sinners saved.

One very bright and sparkling company which we may see flying upward with their crowns of praises are—

‘ Babes thither caught from mother’s breast,  
Who claim to sing above the rest,  
Because they’ve reached the happy shore,  
They neither saw nor sought before.’

Weeping Rachels! Your family harp may have lost its sweetest string, but there’s one harp in heaven the more! If you only saw what a beautiful cherub your child has become, would you shed another tear?

How came ye there, ye blessed little ones? They all answer, ‘Our robes were washed and made white.’ How? In your own innocence? No. In the water of your baptism? No. ‘They were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.’ Blessed ones! Stay where you are. We would not ask you back. You would not come. We will go to you.

I love to think of heaven as made up so largely of little children! And the praises of heaven are such as children here may long to sing—

‘I would be like an angel, and with the angels stand,  
A crown upon my forehead, and a harp within my hand;  
Then right before my Saviour, so glorious and so bright,  
I’d wake the sweetest music, and praise Him day and night.’

The old painters have given us pictures of Jesus with a halo round His head.

We want you to crown the King in another way. We want you to weave your best affections into gar-

lands of thanksgiving, that they may glitter for ever round that blessed brow. Why shouldn't you all be the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus ?

I heard a boy say, 'But I don't know what faith is.' I answered, 'Yes—but you do know. For if you saw one of your schoolmates coming along the street, and you cried to him, "George, where are you going ?" "Where ? To Uncle John's. He said he would give me a shilling if I came to him just now." "Did he promise you a shilling ? and do you expect to get it ?" "Yes, I do expect to get it—for *Uncle John is always as good as his word.*"' Now, that is faith, taking Uncle John at his word ; and Bible faith is taking Jesus at His word.

'Jesus, our everlasting King,  
Accept the tribute which we bring,  
Accept Thy dearly-bought renown,  
And wear our praises as Thy crown.'

This may be His coronation-day, if it be the day of your coming to Him, if it be the day when you bring some one to Him, as Andrew did to Peter when he took him by the arm, and 'brought him to Jesus.'

Paul, when speaking of those whom he had brought, says, 'What is our hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing ? Are not even ye ?'

Beautiful upward steps these—*hope—joy—crown.*

Your parents and teachers bringing you to Jesus—that is our '*hope.*'

When we see you at peace with God—that is our ‘joy.’

When we behold you, by and bye, in your white robes, spotless, in the image of Jesus, ‘when Jesus comes’—that will be our *crown*—our ‘crown of rejoicing.’

Would you like to put a crown upon the head of Jesus, when He comes? Well, if you come to Him, you will be His crown; and if you bring anybody to Him, you will put a crown upon His head. Even you little boys and little girls can become jewel-gatherers for the Redeemer’s crown.

Will you *try*?

## Extracts from an Address given at an Annual Meeting of the Tract Society in 1873.

‘ ARE our spirits ever more elastic, or our homes ever more bright, than when we are dispensing to others the mercies we have received from the Lord ? Was it not in the breaking of the bread that Jesus multiplied it ? and then, “ over and above unto them that had eaten ” were there not “ twelve baskets full ” ? Just so, is it not in the distribution of His gifts that you may most confidently count upon His smile ? and are not the outgoings of your Christian kindness now coming back by a blessed reaction into your own hearts, in a deeper and fuller and ever-augmenting stream ? ’ . . .

‘ The new phrases in which many talk of the grand old doctrine of substitution are fig leaves that a fallen theology has sewed together to hide its own nakedness. Alas ! that while calling themselves disciples, they should, in a night of their own making, have taken down our Lord from the cross, and I know not where they have laid Him. Thank God, that amid such subtle, insidious scepticism, your Society is giving no uncertain sound. You adhere undisguisedly and

unyieldingly to the old, red, crimson cross which stands at the centre of the universe, and hard by that cross the empty sepulchre, and with the risen Redeemer all things rise.' . . .

‘ There are few fellow-labourers I am happier to meet than one of your tract-distributors, threading her way from one stair to another, and knocking from door to door. Instinctively I say “ God speed ” to one who is so like the symbolical woman in the gospel, lighting her candle, and sweeping the house, and seeking diligently for the piece that was lost. Her step is too soft to be heard by the world; but over every handful of corn she scatters, she keeps pouring the dewy influence of prayer. It is in the stillness of the night that the dew is formed; but when the morning sun darts abroad his rays, the beautiful result is visible on every spire of grass and the spray of every tree. So, when the everlasting day breaks and the shadows flee away, will not some of the sweetest surprises of glory be found in similar resurrections of your “ works of faith and labours of love ”? I recollect an old lonely widow, whose hearing and eyesight were failing her, and who had one of your tracts lying beside her. When asked if she was still able to make it out, “ Oh,” said she, “ I’m so thankful since they put the tracts in *big* print! Yet it is little use I can make of them in ordinary daylight. Only there’s an hour or so in the afternoon, when the sun comes round and shines in strong at my little bole o’ a window there—then I

pick up the tract, and strain my eyes to catch the words by which I hope to be saved." I wonder whether the sun, in all his wide journeying from east to west, performs any nobler function than that of lighting such an aged pilgrim on to the better land.' . . .

' From the moment a soul is won, the value of life is, how much of Christ can be put into it.' . . .

' The safety of the highest is bound up with the condition of the lowest, and our country may be startled some day by what will sadly rebuke us for our neglect of means for checking such sins as are carrying poison into so many hearts, and havoc into so many homes. When a Christian friend was lamenting the state of things, and remarking, "We must employ another missionary," the answer given was, " Better still, be *you* the missionary *yourself*!" ' . . .

' I believe it is face-to-face converse that is best fitted for bringing the healing influence of the gospel to bear on the fermenting mass of depravity around us. The salt of Christian character must come into contact with it. Jesus touched the leper when He cured him. What we want is more of that touch of brotherliness and sympathy. It was not the sending of the prophet's staff that would do. He had to stretch himself upon the body, and then the flesh of the child waxed warm.' . . .

' In the great firm of the Church there are to be no sleeping partners. In His great atoning work, " of

the people there were *none*" with Him. But in the ingathering of souls, He expects His people to be *all* with Him. To-night there has been no lack of fuel to feed the fire of godly enthusiasm. But nothing petrifies the heart like having our feelings stirred, and then going away to do nothing. All the glow of this happy occasion will be but a deceitful cordial, unless it be turned to some practical purpose of more honest, earnest work for souls. "Go out quickly and tell." Yes, *quickly*; for if we don't get more hands to the pumps the water will gain upon us, and the vessel will go down. "Go out *quickly*;" for soon you and I will not be here. We have not to work long—what need to work well! Time is flying, and the Lord coming. We must have more work done for Him ere He comes—something He will be pleased to see when He comes.'

‘Love Divine, all Love Excelling.’

ADDRESS AT THE NOONDAY PRAYER MEETING IN  
EDINBURGH.

THE key-note struck for us to-day is LOVE. Indeed it was struck in heaven from all eternity, and all religion on earth is but an echo of it. ‘*He first loved us;*’ *therefore ‘we love Him.’* And while I quote a few words more from ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved,’ may you and I, dear friends, have John’s place at the feast of gladness—the very bosom of Jesus—feeling the throb, and catching the glow of His heart, and learning love there as John learned it: ‘*God is love.*’ ‘*We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.*’ ‘*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*’ Words these from which it is plain that religion, as a principle, is—

(1.) *Love from God to man.* Never do I feel so much at a loss, or so thoroughly dissatisfied with anything that can be said, as when *this* love is my theme. Oh for a warmer heart and a louder song! When Sir James Mackintosh was dying, a friend saw his lips

move, and when the ear was put down, it caught the whisper, ‘God—Love—the very same.’—Yes, Love is the only word convertible with God. It is not His mere name, but His nature—His being—Himself. How is God affected towards us? His own full answer is given in Jesus dying, ‘the Just One in the room of the unjust.’ God’s hatred of sin is a central perfection of His character. If that were wanting, or weak, we could neither trust nor revere Him, but Holy Love is the crown out of which all His attributes, like costly gems, emit their varied though equal lustre.

Man loves what is lovely, but God loves the unlovely to make them lovely. There is no foundation for my love to God, except the old one, ‘God loves me.’ There is no proof that that foundation has been laid, except the old one, with its triple emphasis, ‘God so loved, that He loved the world;’—‘So loved the world, that He gave His Son;’—‘So loved, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Think not that Jesus died to produce love in the Father’s heart, love that was not there before. ‘For the Father Himself loveth you.’ ‘Hereby perceive we the love of God;’ but the words ‘*of God*,’ standing in our translation, occur not in the Greek. Literally the verse runs, ‘Hereby perceive we *the love*’—what true love really is, and *can* do and *has* done. God’s omnipotence—it is the arm of His love. God’s threatenings—they are the *hoarser* voicee

of His love. By the grave of Bethany, you see love weeping. On Calvary, you see love strong as death, yea stronger. It has no match among the deeds of men; it has no precedent among the wondrous ways of God. He has gone to the uttermost in nothing but His love. What magnet can draw us, if not that? What fire melt us, if not that?

If we rightly feel that 'God is love,' we must feel it to be an essential part of the description that God must love Himself—that He can do Himself no wrong when His love runs to meet and embrace His prodigal child. Where can we get at this feeling but by going deep down into the suretyship of Jesus? There we see Love, not stealing round by the back of a throne on which Law is sleeping. No, it comes to us under the sanction and smile of law.

It is by the awful lights of His law that God reveals the sweet vision of His love. Eternal love is wedded to eternal law, and they have found their bridal home in the cross of Christ. 'He loved us, and gave *Himself* for us,' a propitiatory, expiatory sacrifice. The barrier which guilt had erected between us and God, Christ neither evaded nor rudely broke through, but in the way of that satisfying Atonement He righteously removed it. To any soul that would fain get into friendship with God, *this* is the portal—*this* is the passport. 'All things are now ready' on God's

side. The question of law is settled, and the gospel begins with us *after that*—begins with the proclamation of forgiveness full and free. Low thoughts of this lie at the root of all our low religion. There is only one thing in which God is said to rest, 'He will *rest in His love*'—in His beloved Son, in whom He is ever well pleased. The smile which greets Jesus the believing sinner shares, and then there is no one attribute of God more on his side than another;—they all breathe benediction over him. Here all true theology begins, and only ends to begin again.

When a mother was telling her little girl how 'God so loved' us, the child looked up, and said, 'That can't be true, no it *can't*, for if that were true *everybody would be speaking about it*.' Ah! friends, how many souls may have stumbled into perdition over our silence about 'love so amazing.' What swelling thoughts would fill our breasts, what burning words would drop from our tongues, did we speak as we ought of His kindness, His *loving-kindness*; His mercy, His *tender* mercy. I have no strings sweet enough to tell its tenderness, or loud enough to tell its strength. Inspiration itself can find relief only in adoring exclamations, which are among the most welecome words of the Bible, for they give outlet to the fulness of the burdened heart. 'Behold what manner of love!' 'O the depth!'

(2.) Out of love from God to man springs the

refluent tide of *love from man to God*. It is not clear views of our duty to God, but clear views of God's love in Christ to us, that win us over to new obedience. The 'bands of a man' are the 'cords of love.' The way to shine is to be shone upon, and the way to love is to be loved, and to know that you are loved. For then you are not dragged against your will—your will is won, and you move on in God's service not like a slave under the lash, but as a happy child with an open bosom and a beaming face.

'Perfect love casteth out fear.' In the original of that verse there is an article before the word perfect so that the true meaning seems to be, '*The* perfect love,' manifested on Calvary, floods out fear, sweeps it away on the crest of its rejoicing wave. Summer brooks are soon dry, for they owe their waters only to occasional thunder showers; but the stream which issues from the well of God's love is ever flowing. Keep your mouth at this well, and while you draw your joy from it, the Bible never teaches you to suspect you can carry that joy too far.

We can leave no man with the apology for not loving God, that he has no assurance that God loves him with the same love that led Him to give His Son to die. The more freely that we tell it, the more truly do we tell it. It is the royal chariot in which the Spirit loves to ride. Is it for want of telling out this holy love in its blessed broadness, that conversion on a large scale has been so rare? Unless the know-

ledge of this love be lodged in the heart by the Spirit’s power, that heart may be tortured, but its ‘hurt’—its jealousy of God—can never be ‘healed,’ so that it may feel at home with God. During the last two months—when the Holy Ghost has been given in so much of His teaching and transforming power—had the wondering question been put round among those who have received salvation, What drew you? what made you ashamed of your averted face? the response would have been, The charm of God’s love believed. Long did terror make us try to hide our enmity, but now love has *slain* it. It has stamped upon sin the broadest, blackest brand. ‘How can we do this great wickedness,’ and so wound our Best Friend’s heart, and make it bleed again?

The more freely God’s love is revealed, the more deeply do we feel our sin condemned, and being ‘forgiven much,’ we ‘love much.’ First pardoned, then purified, and purified by being pardoned, God’s pardoning love believed becomes the sanctifying love—sweetening the pulse of our spiritual being into tender trust and grateful devotion.

In yon workshop the other men were using their tools so sluggishly, and wearying for the hour of dismissal to strike. But after they had rushed away home, you might have seen one youth remaining, and singing at his work, and when you asked the reason why, he sweetly said, ‘Those others are hirelings, paid by the hour; but I have an interest in the business

here ; it is my father's business, and a loving father he has been to me.' Oh yes, it is love that is most prolific of loyal, devoted labour. The only way to give forth more visible graciousness is, to let in the love of Jesus in a deeper, fuller, and ever-augmenting stream ; and with that love comes the Spirit's fire, burning up corruption, and making you bright with the beauties of holiness. Obedience is the daughter of love—love the daughter of forgiveness—and forgiveness the daughter of God, born beneath the cross on which the dying Saviour hung. *There* your submission is love kissing the rod ; your repentance, love washing the feet of Jesus with its tears ; your zeal in winning souls, love on fire. Give us more of that hidden fire, and all the rest will follow.

(3.) One thing that is sure to follow is the *circulation of more love from Christian to Christian, and from man to man.* 'The fruit of the Spirit' (not fruits but fruit, all one cluster upon one stalk)—'the fruit of the Spirit is *love*, *joy*, *peace*,' etc. All those others are but the expansion of the foremost—'*love*.' '*Joy*' is love triumphing; '*Peace*,' love resting ; '*Long-suffering*,' love bearing up under the heavier, and '*Gentleness*,' under the lighter, trials of life ; '*Goodness*,' love going forth into active usefulness ; and '*Faith*,' love sitting and receiving back again answered prayer to its own bosom; '*Meekness*,' love controlling the passions of the mind, and '*Temperance*,' the same love *subduing* those of the body. Sweet family of sister-graces, these three—

‘Faith, Hope, and Love’—but Love is ‘the greatest.’ For while you believe for yourself, and hope for yourself, love makes you a blessing to all around you. Love most resembles God, and ‘love never faileth.’ ‘The spirit of love’ is always ‘the spirit of power’ when it is ‘the spirit of a sound mind.’

From one loved cheek in your circle the healthy colour is flying; the hectic glow has taken its place. Some foreign elime must be tried. But tell me—lovest thou not the dear invalid more than all your domestic comforts? Yes; and you show it by your being ready, for her sake, to bear all the annoyances, and expenses, and vicissitudes of ‘travelling and tabernacling in strange places, and among strange people.’ So Jesus cuts down to the very core of the matter, when He looks you in the face, and asks, ‘Lovest thou Me *more than these?*’ More than these, your worldly gains, and all your worldly frivolities. He offers you superior entertainments, far sublimer joys. Who need envy the pleasures of an insect, after having tasted more than the joys of angels, for—

‘Never did angels taste above  
Redeeming grace and dying love.’

It is where *saerifice* begins that the proof of love begins. Giving of one’s surplus may be no proof of love at all. It is for the sake of your own happiness, for the culture of that love which is the essence of all

Christian character, that we ask you to consecrate your souls and your substance to the service of Christ's glory—not because He has called us to do anything of that sort to save ourselves, but just because He *has* saved us, and has prepared the song for us to sing for ever—

‘To Him that loved the souls of men,  
And washed us in His blood.’

Archbishop Usher, on his visit to Samuel Rutherford, called love the ‘*eleventh* commandment.’ It was no flash of trivial fancy, or of eccentric speech. For is it not verily a *new* commandment, which enjoins love with such a new impressiveness, and after such a new model, ‘*As I have loved you*’? To love like John is a lofty prize to run for, but who can love like Jesus! If our love be *in kind* like His, shall we not love others before they love us? And it will be no mere matter of sentimental luxury, but of practical readiness for sacrifice. Did Jesus delegate to angels His glorious redemption deed? No, it was His own personal act; and certainly the work of all of us, in alluring souls to eternal life, will be most Christ-like work, when it is wrought in face-to-face converse, directly by ourselves. ‘You had such an honour,’ said a mother to her little daughter, who had been walking out with an aged Christian professor. ‘You had such an honour to walk so far with one who loves the Saviour.’ ‘What,’ said the child, ‘love the Saviour,

does he? He never spoke a word to me about the Lord.’ What a sagacious critie in matters of consistency is a little child! When the aged friend heard of it, it led him more than ever to seek opportunities, and to embrace such as arose unsought, for telling out the ‘*old, old story of Jesus and His love*’.

Surely *such a time as this* is the time for our learning to love *as* Christ loves, by loving *all* the disciples, just because they belong to Christ. Does not feeling heart to heart make us wonderfully apt to see eye to eye? Is not the motto on the family arms—‘*By love serve one another*’? Let the love of Christ, the most sublime of all motives, and the glory of Christ, the most sublime of all ends, become the ruling principles of action; then who can live for mere sect or party? Who can help living magnanimously for man and for God? Has it been common to say, When the Millennium comes we shall have Christian love? Shall we not rather put it thus: When the visible love of the Brotherhood falls on the world with the force of a demonstration that the Father hath sent the Son—the Millennium is on us before we are aware.

‘*He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him*.’ Magnificent Home of love! God our home! Yea, wonder rises upon wonder, that we should be God’s home! From such a Heaven here, it cannot be far to go to the heaven ‘over there’—where they bathe in an ocean of love, and soar in an atmosphere

of love, singing as they soar the new song to the new tune of love eternally. ‘Oh, sing of His mighty love !’ ‘Bless the Lord, ye His angels,’ for all His love *to us* —*to me*—I cannot as I would—ye can as ye should —‘Bless the Lord, ye His angels ! Bless the Lord, O my soul !’

THE following letter, addressed to the Rev. Dr. Robertson of Irvine, has been found since the passing of these pages through the press, and too late for insertion at the proper place, towards the close of Chapter V. It was written by the elder brother to the younger, at a time when both were from home, and when the younger was suffering under illness.

‘Falkirk, 25 May 1838.

‘MY DEAR W.—In sorrow doubly dear indeed. It was with heart and eyes full that I read the heavy tidings of this evening’s letter from home. My heart has been at Glendevon every moment since, and the feelings of these moments have been of a number which I cannot count, and of a character which words cannot convey. “The voice said, Cry,” and as Hope and Affection lifted up their plea for you, and asked, “What shall we cry?” the answer seemed to be still sounding, “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.” “The Lord liveth, and blessed be our” unchanging “Rock.” This Rock is — at least I know my dear W. supremely wishes it to be — his only resting-place; and even should his shattered bark seem on the point of foundering amid the swell, does he not lift up his eyes, and — lo ! Jesus is walking

on the waves. One glimpse of Him, one smile of His countenance, one note of the music of His voice, “Be of good cheer, it is I,” will have as wonder-working an energy in the unruly heart, as the “Peace, be still” of Gennesareth. Oh, I trust that He in whose hand our life is, who has so often heretofore made us ashamed of our fears, and been better to us than all our hopes, will endow your constitution with a buoyant and compensating power, and perfect that which concerneth you; and that, in the meanwhile, His own most blessed peace settles on your spirits, infusing a sweet willingness to “lie passive in His hands.” Are they not the hands of Infinite Love? Could I suppose that my hand or voice was able in the least to lighten the load or assuage the anxieties that may sometimes consumingly prey upon you, soon would I be beside you. I know the “heart of a stranger” within the curtains, the hours of dimness and mystery, in which we feel as if struggling through an eclipse of frustrated hopes, and the gigantic gauntness which our sorrows assume, when descried through the mist of our own fears. It throws us upon the meaning of our professions. “It sobers a man,” says the Duke of Sussex. I speak of it, not as a mere theorist, my dear W., not from the hearing of the ear only, I hope; for the greatest trials of my life have been the greatest mercies of it. Next to God’s “unspeakable gift” has been this *long* gift to me of a bitter cup of blessing. And on this new cup of yours I have been struggling to inscribe “Father”—for it *is* the messenger direct of a father’s faithful love—“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from *us*,” nevertheless, Thy will be done—not ours. The moments in which we are able to utter this last divine

petition, with most entire surrender of heart, are those in which we taste most of the sweets of the liberty wherewith Christ hath set us free.

‘I am glad to know that you have enjoyed the influences of that sympathetic affection which sits enthroned in our earthly father’s heart. His visit would be a balm to you. But after the utmost possible estimate of such precious parental tenderness, are not the sweet words of the Saviour’s suggesting—“*How much more*”—applicable to all your desires and expectations connected with the overflowing fondness and faithfulness of our Father in heaven? Glory be to His name for these very strokes, if they are unmasking the world to our view, and moulding us into a conformity to the image of His Son!

‘Do you remember J. W.? . . . I am seeing him often in his sick-chamber. He feels the “world receding,” shrinking into its proper dimensions—*a speck*. He has a calm hold of the Cross. *This* is the victory that overcometh. The soft lustre of a confiding composure is the uniform character of his experience, though nature must now and then have its struggles. There is a simple-hearted, exclusive reliance on a risen Redeemer and a finished Redemption, and this chastened by the lowliest self-distrust.

‘Poor James Halley too. His laurels are not perennial; you know that he is in Madeira, and by last accounts “the post of observation darkens every hour.” But he knows his refuge and hides in it. “Out of the eater has come forth meat, and sweetness out of the strong.”

‘What shadows we pursued! What shadows we are! “There’s nothing *true* but heaven.” I have been the privileged though weeping witness, for the last two

weeks, of some of the most sublime scenes at the dying bed of an “old disciple.” Never does religion look so lovely as when emerging from the valley of tears—the fruitful valley—where it has acted as a guide into the territories of death, and enlivened to the desolated heart the loneliness of bereavement. Never have I been more edified by a practical exposition of those views of the Gospel, which are alone adequate to “stay” the soul in “*perfect* peace” in the last awful juncture. Never did I feel more firm in the faith of the preciousness of Christianity, and the blessedness of our being Christians. Never have I seen so much of the holy and consoling beauty of the believer’s resources in a “dark and cloudy day.” I have learned this *new* lesson—how much more impressive the passive graces are than the active, and how much of the good one’s heart loves to do he may be doing even when his “heart is overwhelmed” within him. How exceedingly may you and I, my beloved brother, feel quickened and established in the hope that our gain shall exceed the loss now, when *our* turn has come to pass through like “fiery trials”—ay, even should they be heated seven times more than is wont—if it be to burst a sevenfold chain, and to set us free to “walk with God.”

‘In order to give your chest every sort of fairplay, I do not wish to engage your promise to write to *me*. I shall be hearing from home, and you may try to guess how happy it shall make me to hear that “Richard’s himself again”—quite out of the reach of Dr. Kay’s artillery—how I shall exchange “the spirit of heaviness” for tears of gratitude and “songs of deliverance.” Were it not for said “heaviness,” and that I am scribbling with such despatch of urgent speed, I might

have attempted to initiate you into some of the mysteries of best-manship, and the other sport of the day when Mr. —— was spliced. He is to assist at the communion here in two weeks. George Jeffrey preaches with us on Sabbath. The Bannockburn folks will have a smell—perhaps a nibble—at him. I am burdened with a desire to write more to you than I am able. I cannot tell you how much more than ever I am yours in true love,

J. R.'



There has been erected in the Vestibule of Newington Church, where he ministered, a medallion bust in marble, bearing the following inscription:—

IN MEMORY OF  
THE REVEREND JAMES ROBERTSON,  
THE FIRST MINISTER OF THIS CONGREGATION.

INDUCTED 11TH OCTOBER 1848. DIED 3RD JUNE 1879.

AN ABLE AND ATTRACTIVE MINISTER OF THE WORD,  
A FAITHFUL AND DEVOTED PASTOR,  
A PRIZED 'SON OF CONSOLATION.'  
REDEEMING LOVE WAS HIS MESSAGE, THE WINNING OF SOULS HIS MISSION.  
THE LAMBS OF THE FLOCK HE TENDED WITH SPECIAL CARE.  
'A MAN GREATLY BELOVED.'  
HE RESTS FROM HIS LABOURS, AND HIS WORKS DO FOLLOW HIM.



MORRISON AND GIBB, EDINBURGH,  
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